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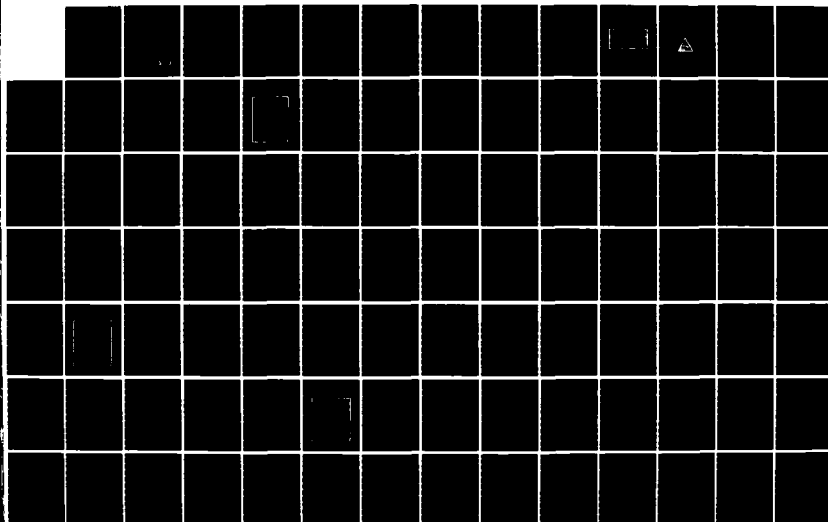
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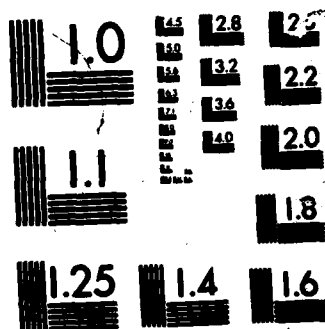
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THE LAST PURSUIT

Combat Studies Institute
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 (continued) Twelfth Army
 Division Scharnhorst
 Various Volkssturm, anti-aircraft, and other military and paramilitary units.

SYNOPSIS: ⁽²⁷⁾ At the end of March, 1945, the 2nd Armored Division broke out of the Ninth Army's Bridgehead over the Rhine in the vicinity of Wesel and began to race across the north German plain. On 1 April, after a frantic call from VII US Corps commander Collins, CCB was diverted to Lippstadt to link up with the First Army's 3rd Armored Division and complete the encirclement of Germany Army Group B in the Ruhr industrial area. CCA, followed shortly by CCB, continued the drive across central Germany meeting scattered, weak and disorganized resistance. On 11 April, units of the division reached the Elbe and, after unsuccessful attempts to consolidate a bridgehead on the east bank, ceased active combat operations.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Bradley, Omar and Blair, Clay A General's Life.
 Conquer: The Story of the Ninth Army.
 MacDonald, Charles B. The Last Offensive.
 Ryan, Cornelius The Last Battle.
 Toland, Joyn The Last 100 Days.
 Trahan, E. History of the 2d Armored Division.
 Weigley, Russell Eisenhower's Lieutenants.
 US Department of the Army Unit After Action Reports.

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THE LAST PURSUIT

The 2nd US Armored Division's Exploitation
from the Rhine to the Elbe

24 March-14 April 1945

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SECTION I

Introduction to the 2nd Armored Division Exploitation



SECTION I

"Introduction to the 2d Armored Division's Exploitation from the Rhine to the Elbe, 24 March - 12 April 1945"

Introduction

On 24 March 1945, the twelve divisions of the powerful US Ninth Army began to cross the Rhine River, the last major obstacle between the surging Allied armies and Germany's heartland, during the final, desperate days of the Second World War in Europe.(1) Nineteen days after these historic assault crossings, the Ninth's 2d Armored Division became the first Allied unit to reach the Elbe River and was commanded to halt on its banks to await the arrival of the Soviet Army, driving westward out of shattered eastern Germany. This exploitation had carried the 2d Armored Division over 220 miles through the low, rolling hills and flat farmland of northern Germany and included a link-up with the 3d Armored Division of the First US Army which sealed off Germany's last reserves of organized resistance, Field Marshal Model's Army Group B, trapping them in the urban jungle of the Ruhr industrial area.(2) 12th Army Group commander, General Omar Bradley, described this dramatic envelopment:

Issac D. White's 2d Armored Division...drove due east, along the north bank of the Lippe River toward Paderborn, where Joe Collin's (VII Corps) had been consolidating his positions for several days. At Lippstadt, White angled southeastward. On Easter Sunday, April 1, at 4:00 p.m., White's advance units linked up with elements of Collin's 3d Armored Division. The pincers were closed; the Ruhr was now encircled.(3)

Although units in the "Ruhr Pocket" would continue to resist for the last agonizing month of the war, the 2d Armored Division's lightning advance had doomed Model's army group to withering impotency.

This exploitation from the Rhine to the Elbe provides an excellent example of one of armor's classic roles and can be compared to the much publicized whirlwind race across France of Patton's 4th Armored Division the previous summer. Had the Ninth Army's steady, reliable and competent commander, Lieutenant General William H. Simpson, been more of a showman like his colorful counterpart in Third Army, history may have shed more limelight on the 2d Armored Division's remarkable run. General Bradley was impressed by this rapid exploitation and his opinion succinctly summarizes this "magnificent performance":

Simpson's Ninth Army, spearheaded by McLain's XIX Corps, turned in another magnificent performance. White's 2d Armored Division troops were first to reach the Elbe - at about 8:00 p.m. on April 11, at Schonebeck, south of Magdeburg...only nineteen days had passed since Simpson first crossed the Rhine. His Ninth Army traveled 226 miles in that time..."It was truly the blitzkrieg in reverse." (4)

After 32 months of hard fighting through North Africa, Sicily, France, Belgium, Holland and, finally, Germany, the soldiers of the "Hell on Wheels" division could relax and reflect on their outstanding combat record. The only duty remaining for these battle-weary troops was a pleasant one - leading the American victory procession into the rubble of the captured enemy

capitol, Berlin.

Sources

The sources available for the analysis of this action are generally of two types - books and government documents. The documents consist chiefly of operation orders, after action reports, technical studies, branch school student reports, daily summaries and standing operation procedures. 2d Armored Division actions are mentioned in general terms in broad overview accounts such as Russell Weigley's Eisenhower's Lieutenants or John Toland's The Last 100 Days , but are covered in more detail in unit histories, such as the excellent Conquer: The Story of the Ninth Army .

Conquer ; the Ninth Army's official unit history, is a superior example of the multitude of these books produced shortly after the end of the war and provides a well organized presentation of that army's actions including the 2d Armored Division's exploitation. This book was useful in detailing the division's drive from the Rhine to the Elbe and helped place the unit's activities in context with other XIX Corps and Ninth Army unit actions. Donald Houston's Hell on Wheels: The 2d Armored Division is another of the unit histories and, although not as well written as the Ninth Army book, it nevertheless provides good information on the division's activities.

Charles MacDonald's The Last Offensive , a volume in the official army history of World War II, devotes a chapter to the

race to the Elbe and highlights the advance of all Ninth Army units, including 2d Armored Division. Russell Weigley's Eisenhower's Lieutenants goes over much of the ground covered by MacDonald, focusing on the encirclement of the Ruhr and the actions at the Elbe. Bradley and Blair devote few pages to the sweep to the Elbe in A General's Life , but observing the action from the 12th Army Group commander's vantage point is interesting as is Forrest Pogue's narration of the action from the SHAEF perspective in Supreme Command . Both John Toland in The Last 100 Days and Cornelius Ryan in The Last Battle make general reference to the exploitation to the Elbe.

The unit after action reports, especially those of Ninth Army, were very useful in providing information on 2d Armored Division activities, but the situation was so fluid and units moving so rapidly that the reports are not as detailed as they could have been. The encirclement of the Ruhr was the subject of an Armor School student report in 1949 which describes that operation adequately, although suffering somewhat from the obvious branch parochialism which permeates this series of reports on armored actions in the European Theater. G-2 daily summaries are useful in helping to determine enemy order of battle, a confusing and difficult task due to the disintegration of the German army then taking place. G-1 and G-4 daily summaries and periodic reports are also interesting and useful for supplementary information.

Although General Simpson, Ninth Army Commander, and General

Raymond S. McLain, XIX Corps Commander, are deceased, there are undoubtedly veterans of the staffs of army, corps and 2d Armored Division remaining who could provide a source for interviews which would supplement existing written references. Unfortunately, such interviews are impossible due to time and resource constraints.

Available research sources and references are generally sufficient to enable an analysis of this exploitation consistent with the scope, detail and intent of the battle analysis subcourse requirements.

ENDNOTES

1. Conquer: The Story of the Ninth Army, Washington: Infantry Journal Press, 1947, p. 247.
2. Department of the Army, Ninth U.S. Army After Action Report , April, 1945, p. 1.
3. Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, A General's Life: An Autobiography of General of the Army Omar N. Bradley , New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983, pp. 421 - 423.
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SECTION II

The Strategic Setting-The US Army in Europe, 1944-45



SECTION II

"The Strategic Setting - The U.S. Army in Europe, 1944-45"

Introduction

By the end of 1944 the U.S. Army had evolved into a superbly equipped, highly mobile force of ninety divisions formed from 1292 battalions of infantry, armor, artillery and other combat arms aggregating 2,282,000 ground combat soldiers of the Army's total strength of 7,004,000.[1] Although both the Germans and Russians mobilized more manpower, the American blend of industrial might and nearly complete motorization allowed this relatively lean organization to be sufficient for the task of leading the Allied drive to defeat the war-weary German forces in northwest Europe, while simultaneously tightening the noose around the Japanese empire in the Pacific. Indeed, early projections of American troop requirements were continually revised downward:

Early in 1944, the projected enlisted strength was revised slightly downward, to 6,955,000, but officers were incorporated into the Troop Basis to project an army aggregating 7,700,000. The Army actually grew...to some 8,300,000; but the increase over the Troop Basis did not alter the organization of the force, because the added numbers developed mainly in the men unassigned to specific units, in replacement centers and depots, reassignment centers and hospitals - the "invisible hordes of people" as General McNair described them, "going here and there but seemingly never arriving." [2]

Sixty-one American divisions, organized into five armies totalling fifteen corps were eventually needed in northwest Europe, their ranks filled with 1,700,000 ground combat troops by V-E day.[3]

The brunt of the fighting across France and Germany in 1944-45 was borne by General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group which included General Courtney Hodges' "grimly intense" First Army, General George Patton's "noisy and bumptious" Third Army and General William Simpson's "breezy" Ninth Army.[4] Flanked by Field Marshal Montgomery's 21st Army Group to the north and General Devers' 6th Army Group to the south, Bradley's soldiers were able to attack across the channel into Normandy, break out of this lodgement and sweep across France, survive a violent German counterattack in the Ardennes, breach the Rhine in several places and race across central Germany to the Elbe, linking up with the Russians driving west - all within eleven months. Although not totally perfect in organization, equipment or doctrine, the American Army's accomplishments, nevertheless, bear tribute to the remarkable resilience, industry, ingenuity and leadership of this unique nation. One observer has summarized these traits as "an excellent improvisation":

Probably the best general conclusions which can be made about the American Army of 1944-1945 is that it was an excellent improvisation. Considering that virtually the entire Army had to be created from next to nothing during the period 1940 to 1944, the accomplishment was remarkable. Within this framework, the flaws in the American Army tend to fade. When compared with the flaws in several other armies, they virtually vanish. Certain specific conclusions may be drawn from the American experience.

The principle of total motorization had proven a definite asset, perhaps far beyond the expectations of the men who first proposed it. American units operating quickly and efficiently over incredibly poor roads, accomplished feats of motor transport unheard of in European military experience. Modularization also proved a considerable advantage, streamlining...the repair and maintenance requirements of the entire army, easing command considerations...and facilitating the shipment of units to all areas of the

world.

American inventiveness, mechanical aptitude and initiative proved of tremendous value in combat...American industrial might must also be considered, particularly in its ability to come up with workable arms, a copious supply of communications equipment and a continuous flood of ammunition. The fact that the Army utilized these materials to best advantage... was an additional benefit of American ingenuity.[5]

Improvisation or not, the American Army of 1944-45, led by excellent senior leadership, proved to be an outstanding general purpose combat force.

Organization of the U.S. Army, 1940-1945

From the robust but ponderous "square" division of World War I, General Lesley McNair, Chief of Staff of General headquarters until 1942 and then Commander of the Army Ground Forces, fashioned a more mobile, leaner "triangular" division as the building block for the U.S. Army of World War II. Based upon echelons of three units (i.e. squads, platoons, companies, battalions, and regiments), this organization was influenced by the concepts of pooling, motorization and standardization.

McNair's passion for leanness and flexibility led to the adoption of a basic unit configuration which would include only those elements which would always be needed by that unit. Other resources would be maintained in a centralized "pool" to be attached to the division whenever necessary:

...divisions were not assigned organic reconnaissance, anti-aircraft, anti-tank, or tank elements. These specialized forces would be assigned to corps and army level "pools", and parceled out to the divisions as necessary...As things turned out...it was another matter entirely...Usually, most divisions were permanently assigned tank battalions as well [as tank destroyer and anti-aircraft artillery]. In one case pooling was totally abandoned: the reconnaissance

detachments. The one area where pooling worked particularly well was the artillery...By 1944, the concept of the pool had undergone serious reconsideration and, though officially remaining unchanged, had been tacitly done away with...Indeed, by the end of the war, most of the pool consisted of artillery. The bulk of the additional formations had been permanently assigned to divisions.[6]

More successful than pooling was the decision to generously supply most formations with motor transport, eliminating all horsedrawn transport:

Very early in the preparations for World War II, the Army decided on full motorization...While a motorized army was considerably more expensive than a horse-drawn one, there were several advantages which overrode the expense...Perhaps the two most important considerations of shipping [fodder requiring more shipping than motor supplies.]...The American infantry division was, it should be noted, only "semi-" motorized. It contained, equipment were carried on motor vehicles...[and]...because of the abundance of motor transport in the American Army, the division was, for all practical purposes, completely motorized.[7]

The addition of six quartermaster truck companies could complete the motorization of an infantry division, but most units found such attachments unnecessary, posting advances of over thirty miles a day by "simply [piling] its infantry on its howitzers, tanks and tank destroyers." [8] The mobility gained by this concept was the American Army's most dominant characteristic in northern Europe in 1944-45.

The third concept, standardization, developed from McNair's conviction that a standardized, general purpose force, modified only as deemed necessary by the local theater commander, would prove a more effective, efficient and flexible organization than an army containing any number of highly specialized, and possibly wasteful, units:

To promote flexibility it was very early decided that all formations of a given type would always be identically organized. In effect, whether assigned to a division organically, or whether part of a "pool", a medium tank battalion and so on through the army. Organization, training, equipment, doctrine and procedure were to be identical in all formations of the same type...[there were] no peculiar internal arrangements to cause the division commander headaches. (Consider for a moment the situation in the German Army, where there existed simultaneously as many as seven different infantry regimental organizations!)...[Standardization] greatly facilitated supply and maintenance arrangements... [permitting] supplies to be made tailor-made in "units of fire" [i.e., the basic load of ammunition for a "type" battalion for one day's combat]... Finally, [it] reduced the amount of time that newly assigned personnel required to adjust to their new units.[9]

Of the 89 divisions which eventually emerged from these concepts, 66 were infantry divisions (including 18 National Guard divisions, half of these serving in Europe)[10] consisting of a base organization of three infantry regiments, division artillery, an engineer battalion and division trains.[11] Forty-two infantry divisions formed the bulk of the U.S. Army in Europe in 1944-45:[12]

The infantry division which...emerged from McNair's work and which remained the basic division of World War II was built around twenty-seven rifle companies totaling 5,184 men. Each rifle company consisted of three rifle platoons and a weapons platoon. The rifle platoon consisted of three rifle squads of twelve men each, armed with ten M-1 (Garand) rifles, one automatic rifle, and one model 1903 Springfield rifle. The weapons platoon contained two .30 caliber light machine guns, three 60mm mortars, three anti-tank rocket launchers, and one .50 caliber machine gun primarily for anti-aircraft defense.

Three rifle companies were grouped with a heavy weapons company [162 officers and men with 81mm mortars, .30 and .50 caliber machine guns, and rocket launchers] to form an infantry battalion...Attached to the battalion headquarters company was an anti-tank platoon [with 57mm anti-

tank guns]...Three infantry battlions plus a headquarters company (which included six 105mm howitzers), a service company and an anti-tank company...made up an infantry regiment...Three infantry regiments plus...three antillery battalions comprised the combat elements of a division, supported by division engineer, signal, ordnance, quartermaster, medical and military police units, with a headquarters company and a mechanized reconnaissance troop.[13]

Despite the "pooling" concept, each of the infantry division commanders in Europe by 1945 controlled considerably more than 15,000 troops and often had more units in a "permanently attached" status within their units than organic formations. For example, the 1st Infantry Division on 1 March 1945, had twelve company and battalion sized combat units attached to it more or less permanently, opposed to nine organic formations of battalion and regimental size.[14]

Supplementing the sturdy infantry divisions in Europe were the speed and power of fifteen armored divisions.[15] Basically of two types, an earlier, "heavy" armored division of two tank regiments and one infantry regiment, and a later "combat command" armored division with equal numbers of tank, infantry and antillery battalions, the U.S. armored division was able to field 200 percent more armored fighting vehicles than its German Panzer Division counterpart while using only 85 percent of the authorized manpower strength.[16]

As with the infantry units, armored divisions frequently contained as many permanently attached units as organic formations. In December 1944, the 4th Armored Division, in addition to its organic tank, infantry, antillery (three battalions each), engineer and reconnaissance battalions, had permanently attached

to it six artillery battalions, an anti-tank battalion and an engineer bridge company, as well as miscellaneous combat support units of various sizes.[17] The total strength, minus attachments, of this mobile, flexible armored force was set at 10,937 men and a total of 263 tanks (seventeen tanks per company).[18] The "heavy" armored divisions had 390 tanks but many of these were light tanks, of doubtful utility against the powerful German panzers.

The 2nd Armored Division, created on 15 July 1940, was established as one of the "heavy" armored divisions and retained that organization throughout the war. It had been built upon the existing structure of the "old infantry tank regiments" - relics from the days when tanks were considered but an adjunct of infantry:

The 66th Infantry Regiment (Light Tanks), which until 1932 had been the 1st Tank Regiment, and the 67th Infantry Regiment (Medium Tanks), which had been the 2nd Tank Regiment, were redesignated the 66th and 67th Armored Regiments to form the 2nd Armored Brigade...On March 1, 1942, an Armored Division consisted of 14,620 officers and men, with 252 medium tanks and 158 light tanks. The tanks were organized into two regiments with 4,848 officers and men between them, each regiment...consisting of one light and two medium tank battalions. The "armored infantry" formed a three battalion regiment 2,389 strong. The "armored artillery" was in three battalions with an aggregate strength of 2,127. Engineers, headquarters and service troops made up the remainder of the division...[19]

Despite the fact that McNair's 1943 reorganization of the armored divisions replaced regiments with "combat commands" and equalized the number of tank, infantry and artillery units, the 2nd (and the 3rd) Armored Divisions retained, not only their "heavy" organization but regimental designations as well.[20]

With this organization, developed rather late in the war, the U.S. Army conducted the campaigns in northwest Europe in 1944-45. That it proved adequate to the task is a recognition of the vision of men like General McNair as well as a tribute to the adaptability of the leaders who commanded the units in combat.

U.S. Army Equipment, 1944-45

The equipment used by the American infantryman, tanker, and antilleryman reflected both the strengths and the weaknesses of an organization whose guiding principles were mobility, flexibility and standardization. Blessed with an excellent infantry rifle and superior artillery, the U.S. Army compensated for an inferior tank by capitalizing on its mobility and greater numbers.

The American infantryman was issued the finest shoulder weapon of World War II, the .30 caliber, semi-automatic M-1 Garand, a nine and a-half pound, gas operated rifle whose eight round magazine could be reloaded quickly enough to allow the soldier to fire 24 rounds per minute.[21] Compared to the German rifleman's bolt-operated Mauser 98K, the M-1 was superior in all respects. In other infantry weapons, however, the American soldier was not as fortunate. Much of the M-1's advantage in firepower was overcome by the liberal German issue of machine pistols (the MP38 could fire 500 rounds per minute) to its soldiers. The World War I designed U.S. machine guns were embarrassingly outclassed by the German MG34 and MG42, excellently designed weapons which could fire 850 to 1200 rounds per minute[22] versus the ponderous U.S. M1919's 500 rounds per minute.[23] Only the slow but powerful U.S. M-2, .50 caliber machine gun provided praiseworthy service. The Germans possessed an advantage in their 120mm mortar, although

their 50mm and 81mm mortars were matched by the U.S. 60mm and 81mm weapons, and they outmatched the puny U.S. 57mm anti-tank gun with their superb 75mm and 88mm PAK 40/43.[24] The 47mm Panzerfaust and 88mm Panzerchreck were both superior against armored targets to the 2.36 inch U.S. "bazooka." [25] But the infantryman's problem was minor compared to that confronting the American tankers.

At the time of the Normandy invasion the U.S. main battle tank, the 33-ton M4 Sherman, was clearly inferior to the German PzKw V Panther tank and the monstrous PzKw VI Tiger. "Germany's Panther tanks carried long-barrelled, high-muzzle-velocity 75's and her Tiger's fired 88's, but the largest gun on an operational American tank was still a short-barrelled, low-muzzle-velocity 75." [26] Although the Sherman possessed a few advantages over the German tanks, the U.S. tankers had to ultimately rely on greater numbers in tank encounters:

The forty-three ton Panther excelled the (33 ton) Sherman slightly in speed - 43.5 to 41 kilometers ...Considerably in armor with 120mm front armor (to 81mm for the Sherman); and almost decisively in the superior muzzle velocity and range of its short 75mm gun. The Sherman had better mechanical endurance, not only in its engine but in a rubber-block track with about five times the life expectancy of the Germans' steel track; but endurance became irrelevant if the superior Panther knocked the Sherman out early. On solid ground, the Sherman had slightly better maneuverability, but the Panther with the wider treads and superior flotation reversed this advantage whenever the ground was at all soft. The Sherman had greater rapidity of fire because it was equipped with a gyro-stabilizer and a powered traverse. Nevertheless, the usual dependence of the Sherman in combat against the Panther had to be upon greater numbers of tanks, unless the Sherman's crew were exceptionally skillful tank tacticians. With numbers, Shermans could surround a Panther and hit its vulnerable flanks and rear...[27]

The situation for the U.S. tankers was frequently worsened by the German "stiffening of the panzers by detachments of fifty-six-ton, and eventually larger, PzKw VI's, the Tiger, ungainly but frightening vehicles with an 88mm gun." [28] American tank destroyers, the M10 and M18 with high velocity 75mm guns and later the M36 with a 90mm gun, could defeat most German tanks with well placed shots, but, lacking armor protection, were generally failures in their intended role of seeking out tanks and destroying them. The heavier T26 Pershing tank mounting a long-barrelled 90mm gun did not appear in sufficient numbers to significantly influence armored combat.

American artillery proved to be the great advantage of the U.S. Army and was instrumental in providing the massed firepower which infantry and armor weapons lacked. Available in abundant supply and usually well-stocked with ammunition, U.S. artillery weapons were linked by a superior fire control system which facilitated the massing of fires at the critical point:

With American tanks afflicted by marked shortcomings, and the tank in general moving less to supplant the infantry-artillery team than to join as a new partner with it, perhaps the outstanding element in the American arsenal was the artillery. To both the tank-and-infantry team and the marching fire advances, artillery support was essential. For this war...the Army had available an excellent American weapon for divisional artillery, ready for mass production, the 105mm howitzer...Tests of an American 105, of a split-trail carriage for it, and of better recoil mechanisms, continued through the interwar years, to produce the gun that became "The work-horse of the Army" in 1941-45, a howitzer capable of firing thirteen different kinds of shells at a rate of twenty rounds a minute, with maximum range of 12,000 yards.

For heavier work, the 105 was supplemented with 155mm guns ("Long Tom's"), 8 inch howitzers,

240mm howitzers and 8 inch guns. Increasingly, there were also self-propelled guns.[29]

Excellent communications equipment tied the entire system together and allowed even a single forward observer "to request and receive the fires of all the batteries within range of a target in a single concentrated barrage." [30] The effects of massing the fires of the entire artillery battalion, or even of several battalions, upon a single target was awesome to behold and devastating to endure. The Germans grew to fear and respect the American artillery and gave this branch much credit for Allied gains. "On all fronts artillery caused more than half the casualties of World War II battles; but the artillery was the American Army's special strong suit." [31]

The advantage which American equipment held over German weapons in Europe in 1944-45 focused on an excellent rifle, superior artillery and, in good weather, tactical air support:

The Garand .30 caliber M-1 semi-automatic rifle was the best standard infantry shoulder arm of the Second World War...The standard American medium artillery weapon, the 105mm howitzer...and every other type of American artillery was multiplied by the best equipment and techniques of any army for fire direction, observation and coordination. By 1944, the U.S. Army Air Forces had more than caught up with the early lead of the German Luftwaffe in quality of airplanes and tactics for direct support of the ground battle, though air-ground teamwork still left something to be desired.[32]

Despite these advantages and other American technological developments which occurred throughout the war, the decisive factor proved to be the overwhelming quantity of U.S. equipment which flooded northern Europe during the last year of the war:

Subsequent developments of American military technology included the proximity fuse, shaped charges, bazookas and recoilless rifles, improved landing

craft for amphibious war and the DUKW truck that could move...on water well as...roads, and mobile, flexible fuel pipelines...Despite these impressive qualitative advances, however, the American emphasis remained on quantity of materials...The quantity of American weapons, then, overwhelmed enemies with sheer weight of firepower. The lavish quantity of American equipment and transport gave American forces assured logistical support in any theater of war. Lavish quantity in transport and supplies also gave American forces their immense advantages in strategic and tactical mobility.[33]

German equipment may have been superior in some notable aspects, but American industrial production, untouched and unthreatened by enemy attack, continued to pour forth a stream of rugged, serviceable equipment against which the Germans could ultimately only achieve brief, localized success.

U.S. Army Doctrine, 1944-45

U.S. Army doctrine for conducting the campaigns in northern Europe in 1944-45 was not unlike that used in the last days of the First World War. Indeed, "infantry assault doctrine of World War II was based on the covering fire tactics of the final phase of World War I:"[34]

An American twelve-man rifle squad had a two-man scout section (Able), a four-man fire section (Baker), which included the squad's automatic rifle, and a five-man maneuver-and assault section (Charlie). Customarily, the squad leader would advance with Able to locate the enemy. He would then signal his assistant leader in Baker to fire, according to whatever plan the situation suggested. Thereupon, he would join Charlie for the maneuver to exploit the cover laid down by Baker's fire.[35]

In actual combat, it was not uncommon for the squad leader to be pinned down with the forward elements, causing the resulting uncoordinated assault to bog down and fall apart.[36] One remedy was the habitual assignment of tanks to any sizeable infantry formation which allowed the tanks to take "on centers of

resistance, while the infantry eliminated anti-tank weapons: and other enemy infantry."[37] The 4th Armored Division relied heavily upon this tactic during the Lorraine campaign, sending small teams of tanks supported by infantry forward :to deal with a strongpoint of enemy resistance which was holding up the advance of the main body or to clean out a village or hold high ground to safeguard (an) advance."[38] The 102d Infantry Division reported that, in the Rhinland and during th drive into central Germany, "the usual method of attack across the open ground was for the infantry and tanks to work closely together. Small groups of infantrymen were assigned to each tank with instructions never to desert it and to coordinate their actions with that of the tank. This system worked to perfection."[39]

Another method of advance used by all types of units capitalized on the normally abundant supply of ammunition. This was known as the "marching fire offensive":

A seemingly more old-fashioned method of advance also found growing favor and proved effective...[this was known as]..."marching fire offensive," wherein casualties might be great but results could be too. All the infantry moved forward together in a thick skirmish line, generally with close tank support. Browning Automatic Rifles and light aircooled machine guns went with them. Everybody fired at every possible resistance within reach. All the large weapons that could be mustered laid down a supporting fire. Once again, as in older armies, every man drew psychological support from the mass of his comrades, and once again the enemy felt the psychological shock of seeing a fearsome mass move against him. If the method was old-fashioned, automatic weapons, tanks, and modern artillery coordination could once again make it effective.[40]

The psychological support the men drew from each other is, perhaps, more important than the high volume of fire placed upon the enemy, for as G.L.A. Marshall discovered it was a relatively

few number of riflemen who provided the aggressive fire and maneuver necessary to make the tactical doctrine function and "infantry fire and infantry maneuver both had to depend on a much smaller number of men than the tactical system implied." [41] But the fact that "marching fire" was perceived as producing more friendly casualties caused some units to be reluctant to employ it, thereby reducing its impact in the theater.

Moving above squad level, the doctrine at division level called for the establishment of regimental combat teams (infantry divisions) or combat commands (armored divisions) as the basic maneuver element. The regimental combat team "afforded a method of decentralizing control during fast moving situations. Each combat team was built around an infantry regiment from which it inherited its numerical designations." [42] To this base were usually added: an artillery battalion; a combat engineer platoon; a tank company; and other supporting units such as signal, medical and ordnance. In theory, these regimental combat teams could be dispatched to accomplish some appropriate task in semi-autonomy. In practice, the division commander usually exercised tighter control over his teams in order to better apply the full power of the division against the enemy.

The combat command of the armored division was similar in theory, but was formed on a trivariate of a tank battalion, an infantry battalion and a field artillery battalion as well as supporting units:

Combat commands usually consisted of an armored infantry battalion, a tank battalion, two light and one medium artillery battalion, one reconnaissance troop and engineers. A medical company (the same one each time) supported each as-

sault combat command...usually an artillery group, a TD battalion, an AAA battalion and an infantry combat team was attached to the division. The battalion and two 155mm howitzer battalions. This permitted two light battalions and one medium battalion to support each assault combat command. The infantry combat team was used for mopping up behind the combat commands, and to protect bridgeheads. Seldom was a foot infantry battalion attached to a combat command. Tank destroyers were used with combat commands, to protect division installations and to escort trains.[43]

All of these formations emphasized the doctrine of using firepower, usually artillery, whenever possible instead of manpower. In a deliberate attack of a position the normal procedure was for the artillery to "initiate its preparatory barrage... Depending on what the 'priority' target was, the barrage would periodically lift and switch to new targets. [It would fire at] German artillery positions...[and]...other targets included enemy command posts and centers of communications, road junctions, and enemy routes to approach the front line. When the barrage...was lifted, all batteries were responsible for responding to the calls of their forward observers."[44] The 102d Infantry Division official history describes a typical "prep" prior to an assault on a north German town:

Beginning at H minus 10 minutes, six battalions fired five rounds per gun per minute into the western outskirts of Geneonsweiler. From H-hour to H plus 15 minutes, corps artillery kept the commanding ground around the objective under constant fire. At H plus 15 minutes the fire falling on the western edge of the objective lifted and the six artillery battalions rolled a barrage through the town. At 1100 hours, the ground forces moved forward.[45]

Any enemy units located in the "western outskirts of Geneonsweiler" that day would have received approximately 500 rounds of artillery every minute for what would undoubtedly seem

like an eternity to those forced to endure it. It is small wonder that the German soldier held his opponent's artillery in awesome respect.

In favorable weather, close air support added to the destruction which the American Army could bring down on the German defenses.

The use of fighter-bombers as aerial artillery to assist ground forces was accepted doctrine in World War II. By 1944, the standard Allied practice was to assign squadrons to circle behind the front on-call, in so-called "cab ranks". When ground forces radioed coordinates for a strike, the fighter squadrons would attack and return to base for rearming, while others assumed their cab rank stations. The key here was communication.

Only with extensive pre-planned radio codes and coordinate designation could ground support be counted on.[46]

Additionally, the Army Air Forces were employed to interdict any enemy forces or supplies which were moving toward Allied forces, to delay the habitual German counterattack, to strike forces already in contact and generally disrupt the enemy through aggressive attacks on roads, rail, towns, and river traffic.[47]

This lavish use of firepower proved to be a cornerstone of U.S. doctrine in northern Europe. An example of such free use of ammunition can be seen in one infantry division's ammunition expenditures during a time of relative supply austerity when, in less than ten days of attack in the Rhineland, the division "expended 24,000 rounds of 105mm ammunition, 8,184 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition and 1,712,550 rounds of small arms ammunition aggregating a total of 1007.5 tons." [48] This high volume of fire from a seemingly inexhaustible supply of weapons was able to make the U.S. Army's unspectacular but sound doctrine unbeatable by the German Army of 1944-45.

U.S. Army Leadership, European Theater, 1944-45

U.S. Army leadership in the last two years of the war was built around a core of 15,000 pre-war regular officers to which had been added approximately 100,000 National Guard officers, 100,000 direct commissioned officers, 180,000 from the Officer Reserve Corps and 300,000 Officer Candidate School graduates. "A typical infantry regiment was officered more or less as follows: the colonel, the executive officer and one battalion commander were regular army; one battalion commander was a reserve officer, and one came from the National Guard. Probably two-thirds of the company commanders were OCS graduates; the other one-third consisted of Guardsmen with a few reservists." [49] Thus, the burden of small unit leadership at the tactical level was borne, for the most part, by the officers who had been commissioned after the beginning of the war and who were not products of the pre-war army staff and school system. But above regimental level, at the division and higher headquarters echelon which "demanded leadership and managerial qualities of an exceptional kind", the majority of commanding officers were regular army soldiers including many "who were...exceptional in their skills, as well as in character and decisiveness." [50] That these officers performed well is a tribute to the Army staff and school system as well as to the judgment of the men who selected them:

Even those officers of high rank who enjoyed a fairly large scope for the exercise of their individual abilities reflected the qualities of the pre-war staff and school system. For most of them had long since been selected by their chiefs and by the instructors in the schools as men who would exercise the highest responsibilities if war should come. Not only did the staff and school system train a corps of management and command experts; the system an the chiefs of staff who presided

over it...had succeeded also in recognizing men of more than routine competence and selecting and grooming them early. The Eisenhowers, Bradleys and Pattons did not catapult to the top of the Army by accident; their potential had been perceived and cultivated when they were still junior officers.[51]

The senior American leadership in Europe in 1944-45, headed by Supreme Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, had learned important lessons and "gained invaluable experience in battlefield management"[52] during the early campaigns in North Africa, Sicily and Italy. Eisenhower, especially, learned hard lessons on the value of aggressiveness and team play in his first test of coalition warfare in Tunisia. The poor performance of the U.S. II Corps and of its commander, General Fredendall, demonstrated to Eisenhower that, although pre-war "friendship counted for much", [53] it must not interfere with the relief of any officer who proved indecisive or a failure. Ike personally charged Patton to quickly relieve any officer who showed signs of failing and he repeated this advice to Genow (V Corps Commander). [54]

Fredendall, whose 200 engineers labored for three weeks tunneling II Corps headquarters into an inaccessible mountainside far from the front in Tunisia, showed Ike the value and necessity for senior leadership to be aggressively forward during the critical phase of any operation and for these men not to become wedded to their CP's. [55] A perceived lack of aggressiveness or a tendency for a commander to spend too much time at his command post was justification for relief of the officer during later campaigns in Europe and most division, and even corps, commanders kept their command posts "never far from the firing lines." [56]

In addition to aggressiveness, Eisenhower valued "team play", a

spirit of cooperation between Allied commands which would facilitate his job of waging coalition warfare. Once again, the hapless Fredendall provided an early object lesson, as he was despised by his British counterparts for his outspokenly anti-British attitude.[57] The Supreme Commander could not tolerate such an attitude and placed a high value on officers who, like the steady Bradley, "never caused [him] one moment of worry [and who have] the respect of all [their] associates, including the British officers." [58] Maintaining perfect cooperation among his Allied subordinates, including some whose egos bruised easily, was not always a simple task for Eisenhower. When it became necessary for Eisenhower to assign all of the Ninth and most of the First U.S. Armies to Field Marshal Montgomery's command, a man whose "personality...could be described as cocky nearly to the point of arrogance," [59] during the critical days of the Ardennes counteroffensive, Ike felt obliged to write a personal message to the U.S. commanders concerned to exhort them to "respond cheerfully and efficiently to every instruction [the Field Marshal] gives." [60] That they complied is a recognition of Eisenhower's influence as much as it is a statement of the officers' professionalism.

The northern European campaigns of 1944-45 were clearly marked by Eisenhower's influence and leadership. In addition to setting an example for his subordinates to follow, Ike personally selected division, corps and army commanders (although he often sought the advice of Marshall, Bradley, or SHAEF Chief of Staff, Bedell Smith):

Eisenhower...evaluated every division commander

coming into ETO. If he did not know the man he would discuss him with Bradley or Smith, and if any one of the three generals disapproved, Eisenhower would so inform Marshall and a new commander for the division would be appointed. Eisenhower made every decision on moving generals up from division to corps, or from corps to army, command.[61]

Marshall facilitated this process by agreeing that Eisenhower "need to take no commander unless he had full confidence in him." [62] Subordinate commanders had little latitude in selecting their respective subordinates. For example, General Simpson, Ninth Army Commander, was allowed only to select three officers for his corps commanders from a list of four names previously approved by Eisenhower.[63]

Eisenhower visited his field commanders frequently but "did not interfere with their conduct of operations...usually content[ing] himself with giving [them] a pat on the back and telling them to keep up the good work." [64] General Raymond S. McLain, XIX Corps Commander, has written his opinion of how far down the ranks Eisenhower's influence was projected when he wrote, "As a corps commander, I frequently felt his personal influence, and I know, too, that my division commanders and even some of my regimental and battalion commanders, on occasion, also felt his personal presence and influence." [65] The extent of this influence can also be gauged by the celerity with which corps and army commanders relieved their division commanders for timidity, early failure or "seriously lacking aggressiveness in [their] leadership" - all traits stressed by the Supreme Commander." [66] During the tough fighting in the Cotentin Peninsula, several division commanders were relieved, including one whose unit was engaged for only four days [67] and another whose commander and

assistant division commander were both discovered by Ike at the division CP during an operation when, as Bradley writes, "one of them should have been at the front." [68]

The leadership climate established and set by the Supreme Commander in Europe during the final two years of the war was characterized by an attitude of aggressiveness at the senior American levels under a blanket of teamwork, constantly sought by General Eisenhower at the highest levels. That this climate produced satisfactory results is due, in no small part, to "the 12,000-13,000 officers of the old army [who] had succeeded in preparing themselves mentally for the transition [to war] to a greater extent than the observer of mounted parades and maneuvers...might have suspected. The officers did so thanks largely to an excellent military school system modeled on European examples and long embedded, somewhat incongruously, within the frontier constabulary." [69]

...it was not the abilities of such individuals [as Marshall, MacArthur, Eisenhower and Bradley], however outstanding, that was most impressive about military command in World War II. It was the extent to which command had become a work of staffs and committees, since no individual could hope to hold together in his own mind all the details of supply, movement, order of battle, terrain and climate, and strategic and tactical problems to enable him to command alone...the [men] involved had to be men of skill and ability trained in common principles of management and leadership...The Army staff and school system had produced a remarkable supply of such men, of proven ability and proven capacity to cooperate. [70]

Although quick to relieve when failure or inaction threatened an operation, the senior commanders in northern Europe, nevertheless, demonstrated exceptional character and decisiveness while leading their soldiers to victory.

The Enemy: The German Army, 1944-45

The army which the Allies faced in the last two years of the war was not the powerful, confident force which had beaten France in six weeks and had stormed to the gates of Moscow during a furious summer of lightning warfare. Five years of constant war had drained Germany's manpower reserves to a dangerous level and had severely strained combat leadership and other vital resources. But the German army was far from beaten, thanks to excellent officers, a core of hardened, battle-wise veterans and the focusing of Germany's celebrated efficiency into maximizing the potential of the remaining resources of personnel and equipment:

...the German army in 1944 still could claim to be qualitatively the best army in the world...Its quality lay in firepower enhanced by superior professional skill among the officers and superior combat savvy and unexcelled courage among the ranks...The officer corps comprised only 2.86 percent of the German army's strength at the beginning of the...war and declined in relative strength as the war went on. In contrast, officers represented 7 percent of the overall strength of the American army...By 1944, however, the Germans could no longer find enough manpower to keep up...large divisions...The 1944 German infantry division had only six rifle battalions, in three two-battalion regiments...Though they reduced the rifle company to two officers and 140 enlisted men, they increased the proportion of automatic weapons...The increase in automatic weapons gave the German infantry division superior firepower over its American rival despite having about 1,200 fewer combat infantrymen.[71]

This advantage in firepower over the Allies, of course, refers to small arms only and ignores the Allied advantage in artillery, numbers of tanks and tactical air support. There remained a shortage of manpower problem in German units despite the ability to produce a large volume of small arms fire.

In the period June through August, 1944, the German armed forces suffered staggering losses of manpower, losing almost a million

men out of a total ground force of three million. "Yet, in the same period, 1,427,000 men were put back into the ground forces and in the first quarter of 1945 another 1,626,000 were put into service"[72] Germany was able to accomplish this rather remarkable feat primarily by calling up those men previously exempt from service. Service schools were stripped of demonstration units in 1944 and the school cadres themselves followed them to the front in 1945.[73] All men between the ages of 16 and 60 were eligible to serve in the Volkssturm, a militia-type organization usually poorly trained and poorly equipped. These units were thrown in late in the war and seldom had heavy weapons.[74] A final source of manpower was wounded or disabled veterans, the so-called "stomach soldiers" who were also called back to active service. "This mixed bag was the means by which Germany fielded so many new troops. For the able-bodied, training was scanty, at best. For the not-so-able-bodied, they were often mustered with only the most perfunctory training." [75] Organizing these last manpower reserves into units was also marked by expediency and improvisation:

In addition to generating troops almost faster than they were lost, the number of German divisions and units actually grew until the last few months. However, this was a matter of appearance versus reality. Many units had been reduced to mere cadres during the last months of 1944, with few officers and men...A more basic way of keeping so many units in the field was to change the organization of the unit. The large-scale organization...changed little...The same number of battalions and regiments were in each division. It was at the lowest levels that economies were made...Another expedient was...not maintaining units at full strength. If a battalion had three companies...only two would actually be fielded...Another way...was to combine several Kampfgruppen into a new division...Divisions were raised by fixing a location for a headquarters, assigning a commander...and sending out a few troops. This was the ultimate in instant divisions [but] they were only a fraction of their nominal strength.[76]

Keeping these last units supplied with equipment during the final months of the war was also a serious problem. Although German production of war materials was not as devastated by Allied air strikes as was assumed by Allied planners, nevertheless production could in no measure meet the demands of both fronts. In mid-1944, at the height of availability, total stocks of German tanks were approximately 5,000. These included about 2,300 PzKw IV's slightly inferior to the U.S. M4 Sherman, and about 2,700 of the superior PzKw V Panther and PzKw VI Tiger.[77] These numbers declined dramatically and consistently thereafter and German forces were usually overwhelmingly outnumbered by Allied armored fighting vehicles:

The steady decline of the tank strength in an armored division [German] is particularly apparent. The Germans varied between decreasing the number of tanks in a company and altering the number of companies in a battalion, or battalions in a regiment...In 1941 they had, in their line companies, a total of 153 tanks in a division...in 1944, they were down to 84 and under the 1945 organization, they had only 50 tanks, yet the tank battalion had actually acquired a fifth company. The Waffen-SS Panzer Division...had 102 tanks in the line

companies of the division. The importance of this lies in the fact that it is the company which is the basic command element...to control 100 tanks in 1943, six companies were needed; to control the same amount required ten companies in 1945.[78]

A continuing problem for the German army was its "astonishing dependence on horse transport." [79] The inventors of the blitzkrieg continued to rely heavily on the horse as the means for moving supplies and equipment, and German resistance and morale suffered when they compared their "hobbled" army to the superior "...mobility of the motorized American divisions" racing across France.[80] In one striking example of this mobility, the Germans were amazed to note that, during the breakout from Normandy, one entire American corps of over 10,000 vehicles passed through a single road in 24 hours.[81] The German army of 1944-45 could not match this speed and efficiency.

As the Allies pressed ever closer to Germany and eventually entered the Reich, the German army relied increasingly on fortifications in an attempt to stem the advance. After the drive across France and the bloody battles in Lorraine, the Germans forced the Allies to breach the so-called Siegfried Line, the vaunted West Wall. Never completed as originally planned due to France's rapid collapse in 1940, the final months of 1944 brought on a feverish spurt of activity to strengthen these defenses before the Allies attacked:

The Siegfried Line was actually neither a line nor a wall but an elastic system of fortifications that extended approximately 450 miles from the Swiss frontier to the south to cleve in Holland...Specifically, the Siegfried Line consisted of a system of large and small pillboxes and bunkers with three to seven foot walls. All were protected by interlocking fields of fire and reinforced by minefields, fences and lines of obstacles. In addition, there were anti-tank ditches, machine gun nests

and concrete or steel rail dragon's teeth. Streams and ravines were turned into anti-tank obstacles...Lowlying fields and meadows were capable of being flooded to make them impassable...The bunkers varied in size and accommodated six to forty men...fire control was directly by sight or observation through periscopes...sometimes a centrally located CP bunker was built to direct the fire...It... contained certain weaknesses...the limited fields of fire from pillboxes, the inability of most of the boxes to accommodate guns heavier than 37mm, the lack of sufficient density of defenses to prevent well-planned infiltration by foot troops, and the difficulty of intercommunications during combat.[82]

The Allied assault to break through the Siegfried Line, although interrupted by the German Ardennes Offensive, cost an estimated 140,000 Allied casualties and consumed several months - costs which were "tremendous if one looks...at the relatively small amount of territory taken during the campaign." [83] But Hitler's Ardennes Offensive expended the last of the reserves necessary to effectively continue this defense and the Siegfried Line was the last well-prepared system of fortifications the Allies would face. The defenses in the Rhineland leading to the Rhine river were organized around towns and villages, in an attempt to capitalize on the concealment and cover offered by urban areas:

The open, cultivated countryside afforded good observation and excellent fields of fire but very little concealment except in urban areas and scattered woods. Consequently, the Germans organized community diggings to supplement deliberate fortifications...They were able to produce a series of formidable obstacles in the form of anti-tank ditches and trenches of all types, as well as thousands of L-shaped foxholes. These diggings were generally in belts around towns which formed the nucleus of the defense. Fields, roads and direct avenues of approach were sowed liberally with anti-tank and anti-personnel mines...The entire village was...fortified. Buildings with fields of fire were reinforced with heavy timber, and machine guns and light field pieces were sited inside. Occasionally, the Germans housed a tank this way by driving it through the rear walls and poking its 88 from a break in the fore part of the building.[84]

Eventually, however, the German army was forced out of even these fortifications by the irresistible Allied advance. Unable to muster sufficient mobile forces to properly defend the Rhine, the last great barrier to the Allied drive into central Germany, the German army fought the last month of the war in hastily prepared positions as best it could. Finally, its last major field force in western Germany, Field Marshal Model's Army Group B, trapped in the urban jungle of the Ruhr industrial area by the advancing American columns, the German army began to surrender in ever-increasing numbers. The German army finally died as an effective fighting force along the banks of the Elbe river fleeing the advancing Russians in a last, frenzied attempt to surrender to the western Allies.

A Strategic Overview

Ultimate victory for the Allies on all fronts and in all theaters was, by the middle of 1944, only a matter of time; but a year of hard fighting in Europe and several bloody campaigns in the Pacific remained to be conducted. Assisted by the ever-increasing power of the resurgent Red Army, the Allied forces in northern Europe were poised to deliver the final blow to Hitler's regime. With the success of the Normandy invasion assured, final victory must result.

From the initial landings in Normandy on 6 June 1944, until the surrender of German armed forces the following May, the U.S. Army, chiefly the forces of Bradley's 12th Army Group, had established a secure lodgement in Normandy, destroyed German resistance in France by closing the Falaise Pocket, survived a major counterattack in the Ardennes, cracked through the Siegfried Line

defenses, crossed the Rhine in several places and swept into the heart of the enemy's homeland. The major strategic successes comprising the Normandy lodgement, the Falaise Pocket and the Rhine crossings.[85]

Following the landings of the U.S. V and VII Corps on D-Day, the Americans began pouring in men and supplies, building up the beachhead area as fast as possible, putting ashore 314,504 men, 41,000 vehicles and 116,000 tons of supplies by 19 June.[86]

After several weeks of bitter fighting among the hedgerows of the bocage country, U.S. forces were able to break out of the Cotentin Peninsula as a result of Bradley's COBRA breakthrough scheme near St. Lo after the carpet bombings of that area on 25 July.[87] The next month brought a remarkable change from the static warfare near the beachhead and saw Allied forces, including the U.S. First and Third Armies, racing across France:

In four weeks the battle of stalemate in the bocage had changed to one of great mobility as the Allied forces searched out the enemy along the Loire and toward Brest, encircled and destroyed thousands of German troops in a great enveloping movement at Falaise, and dashed to the Seine to cut off the Germans and threaten Paris...the speed with which the enemy opposition collapsed west of the Seine followed from the unexpected opportunities which Allied commanders had turned to their advantage.[88]

While the First and Third Armies drove eastward, the newly activated Ninth Army assumed responsibility for the VIII Corps' reduction and capture of the fortified port city of Brest on the Brittany Peninsula. Consuming thousands of lives, great quantities of supplies but ultimately yielding no useable port facilities, the decision to capture this stoutly defended citadel has been sharply criticized as detracting from the destruction of

the main German forces farther east:

If the Allied commanders had been able to look into the future and foretell with accuracy the development of the campaign beyond the Seine - the successful pursuit and the capture and opening of ports closer to the scene of the main combat operations, if they could have seen the bitter battle about to develop at Brest, their decision to take that port would have been a mistake.[89]

Stiffening German resistance and lengthening Allied supply lines caused the swift advance of the armies to the east to slow considerably. By mid-September the First Army had swept through Belgium and Luxembourg, and the Third Army had entered Lorraine, driving the Metz and Nancy areas. Also by this time, Devers' Seventh Army, after landing in the south of France, had driven over 300 miles northward to close on Bradley's southern flank.[90] From mid-September until the Germans launched their surprise offensive in the Ardennes on 16 December, the Allied armies waged a bloody battle of attrition from Holland in the north, south to Switzerland. A determined enemy and miserable weather combined to cause a relatively modest advance to the Siegfried Line, this system of fortifications being breached only in the Aachen area. By this time, General Simpson's Ninth Army had been inserted into the line north of First Army and south of Field Marshal Montgomery's 21 Army Group. These battles of attrition all along the line:

...were based on the belief that Hitler's forces were still disintegrating and that some lucky push might find a soft spot in the opposing lines which would permit the Allies to advance to the Rhine before the dead of winter. Later, when it became evident that the Germans had reorganized their forces and had succeeded in manning the West Wall fortifications against the Allied offensive, General Eisenhower refused to accept a static policy for the winter, feeling that even minor advances were better than completely defensive tactics.[91]

These "minor advances" were still grinding away when the German offensive began in the Ardennes. The Allies, although caught off guard by this unexpected attack, immediately began to shift forces and react to the threat:

On 16 December a major German attack began in the First U.S. Army zone in Luxembourg and Belgium. Acting on orders from higher headquarters, Ninth U.S. Army immediately began to regroup its forces in order to release elements for movement to the south to aid First U.S. Army in holding the German advance. The 7th Armored Division was alerted on 16 December at 1745 hours to move south as soon as possible. An advance party departed at 1930 hours to report to the Commanding General of the VIII Corps...[92]

The VIII Corps commanding general, whose thinly spread forces were bearing the weight of the attack, was using some "common sense soldiering" to position his meager forces to hold critical communication centers, such as St. Vith and Bastogne, until the Allied armies could bring sufficient combat power to bear to stop the German attack.[93] To facilitate control of the Allied counterstrokes, Eisenhower attached the Ninth Army and most of the First Army to Montgomery's 21 Army Group north of the bulge created by the German attack. Montgomery retained control of the Ninth Army until 3 April, when Ninth Army reverted to 12th Army Group after the link-up of Ninth and First Armies east of the Ruhr. Following the defeat of the German Ardennes Offensive, the Allied armies continued to advance on a broad front, piercing the West Wall defenses and closing up to the Rhine.[94] German losses of men and materiel facilitated the rapid Allied drive, and an outstanding stroke of good fortune allowed First Army units to capture an undestroyed bridge over the Rhine at Remagen on 7 March.[95] With First Army pouring men and equipment across this

last barrier to central German, Third and Ninth Armies continued their painstaking preparations for assault crossings of the Rhine:

Like the invasion assault across the English Channel, the plans and preparations for crossing the Rhine consumed much more time than the actual execution of the attack. Giving priority, of course, to other and more immediate needs for planning and supervising current operations, Ninth Army planning for the Rhine crossing was carried on, almost continuously for six and one-half months. The assembling of river-crossing equipment extended over five months, and there were engineer troops training specifically for the task of getting the Army across the Rhine most of the time during that same period. The divisions and supporting troops finally scheduled to make the assault crossing trained and rehearsed their part for two weeks.[96]

The remainder of the Allied armies began crossing the Rhine "with consummate ease and few casualties"[97] near the end of the month, with Third Army crossing on 23 March, Second British Army on that same day and Ninth Army on 24 March. Seventh Army began crossing preparations on 25 March.

The "last big pursuit of the war"[98] was about to begin.

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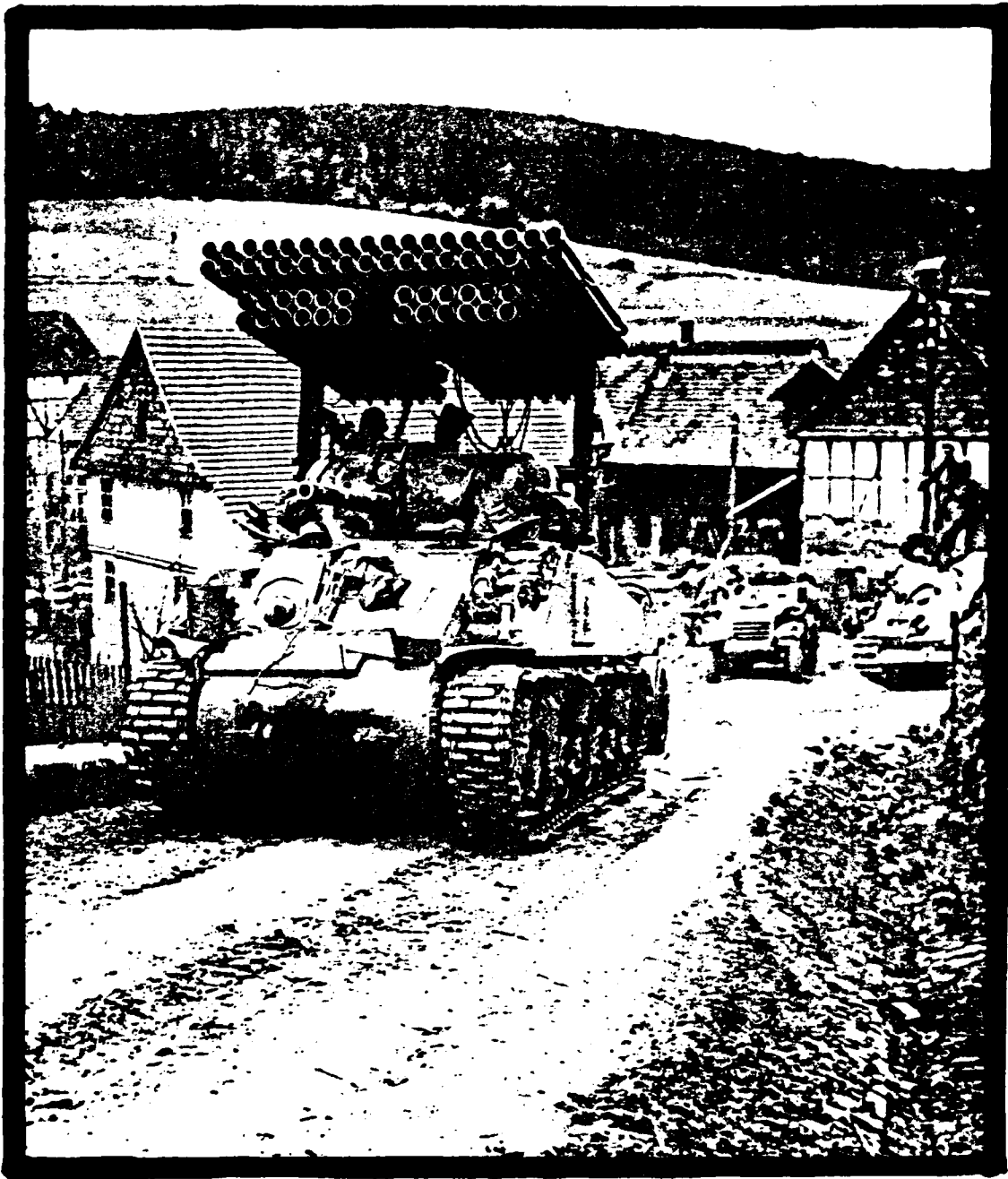
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SECTION III

The Tactical Situation



SECTION III

(REVIEW OF THE TACTICAL SITUATION)

The Area of Operations

The following is a short discussion of the weather and climate in the area of operations. The climate in the northern part of the Ruhr Valley can generally be categorized as rainy and cool. The mean temperature for April in the Ruhr is only 49 degrees Fahrenheit. During this same month, it rains on approximately 13 of the days and has an average monthly precipitation of 2.0 inches. The area can also be characterized by a natural fog and overcast cloud cover because it is in the low Ruhr Valley, coupled with constant haze and smoke from the industrial might of the area. [1]

Climate and weather also seriously effected tactical operations. The soil in the 2nd Armored Division's (AD) sector consists mostly of alluvial deposits from flooding of the many rivers. During wet periods, this soil becomes a barrier to continuous mechanized traffic. However, as you proceed into the western portion of the 2nd AD's route, near Teutorberger Wald, cross-country trafficability increases considerably. The constant rain and melting snow from the Alps can also cause high water and flooding during any season. However, there was no flooding during this operation. The weather was normal for the season and as such caused neither discomfort for the men or excessive wear on the equipment. One major weather related factor, however; was that due to the overcast weather and smog, the XXIX Tactical Air Squadron could not perform precision bombing over either the 2nd AD's opponents or the factories of the Ruhr Valley. [2]

The terrain of the area was a key factor in this operation. The Ruhr

Valley itself was approximately a 6,000 square mile area which supported about 2,500 factories and mines. It was the production center of Germany. It is characterized by rolling hills, deep valleys, and flat uplands stretching 35 miles along the Rhine (from Weser to Dusseldorf) and extending eastward 60 miles to Hamm. The 2nd AD's sector was essentially a low, level plain along both sides of the Lippe River. North of the Lippe River was a swampy marshland and additionally there was some swamp land to the south. However, the middle area was well drained by an efficient canal system. The area in the western and central portions were lightly wooded and speckled with both industrial cities and small villages. In the far eastern sector of the 2nd AD's area, the Teutoburger Wald looms as the dominant terrain feature. [3]

The flat plains which run through this portion of Germany afforded very little observation. Aircraft observation was also somewhat limited due to the overcast weather and smog. This factor applied to both the 2nd AD and their opponents equally. Although the rolling terrain was poor for observation, it was ideal for tanks and their direct firepower, as long as the land was transversable. The marshy terrain and water obstacles to the north of the Lippe River was totally unsuited for armor. However, this highly developed area offered numerous highways for armor movement. Other weapons, such as anti-tank guns, were even used in the direct fire role. It was also suited for the artillery's indirect fire responsibility. The Allied forces had a clear advantage in tanks and both indirect and direct firepower. Thus, they enjoyed a distinct advantage in the critical area of firepower.

The flatness of the plains in the eastern portion of the Ruhr offered very little cover for either side. However, some concealment was found in the small forests, dikes along the rivers, and buildings in the larger towns. In the western part of this sector, the increase in forests did offer good concealment. This was particularly advantageous to the defending German

forces. [4]

The greatest single obstacle to Allied forces after crossing the English Channel to Normandy was the Rhine River. Although the 2nd AD did not have to secure the bridgehead at Wesel, it did have to cross it, and the Rhine was the most formidable obstacle in the Ninth Army's operations. It varies from 700 to 2,000 feet in width, is nowhere fordable, and is known to have high water and flooding during all seasons. The next most serious obstacle was the Dortmund-Ems Canal. There were numerous bridges and underpasses around the canal, but most of these were either blown or heavily defended. Concordantly, if the 2nd AD went too far north or too far south of the Lippe River, they would run into marshy swampland which completely restricted traffic to the roads. Other obstacles to the 2nd AD's movement were the large industrial cities (e.g. Hamm, Lippstadt, and Paderborn) and the Teutorberger Wald in the far west. [5]

These obstacles obviously favored the defending German troops. They established strongpoints in a number of formidable areas and were able to slow the Allied advance by blowing bridges and defending underpasses around the Dortmund-Ems Canal. The battle was also influenced by these obstacles. The securing of bridges over and underpasses under the Dortmund-Ems Canal was the determinant in deciding where our troops would cross and fight. Additionally, the marshy lands in the northern part of this sector helped guide the 2nd AD's choice of avenues of approach.

The most important terrain in this operation was the Dortmund-Ems Canal. It ran perpendicular (north-south) to the 2nd AD's avenue of approach and posed a critical barrier which had to be surmounted. Other critical terrain features were the autobahns from Wesel to Haltern and from Hamm to Lamershagen and the communication centers in the towns of Hamm, Beckum, Lippstadt, and Paderborn. [6]

This key terrain was essential for the allies to secure in order to insure safety for their operations, facilitate their exploitation into the Ruhr, and disrupt the German operations. Although these key features were advantageous to the defending Germans they did not have the troop strength to effectively take advantage of the terrain. They were able to blow up many of the bridges over the canal and fortify many of the bridges and underpasses over and under it, but others went unprotected. This slowed the Allies somewhat, but they were still able to move too quickly through these passes for the Germans to react capably with reinforcements. Thus, the Allies moved rapidly onto the large road networks (autobahns) and advanced rapidly into the exploitation phase.

Widely different avenues of approach were not feasible for the 2nd AD because of the canalizing terrain. The Second Armor was confined to the area in close proximity to the Lippe River because of the excellent road network and cross-country trafficability. The avenue of approach utilized ran from Wesel to Hamm to Paderborn and then into the Teutorberger Wald. This area coincides with the direction of the Lippe River. The areas to the extreme north and south of the Wesel-Hamm-Paderborn region do not contain a good network of roads and are unsuitable for off-road operations because of the swampland.

Because of its rolling, flat plains, the Wesel-Hamm-Paderborn avenue of approach had excellent fields of fire and was well suited for tank warfare. Observation was not particularly good and the cover and concealment were limited. Once over the Rhine River, the movement was very good and was effectively hindered by only the crossing of the Dortmund-Ems Canal. There was definitely enough maneuver space and once over the canal, the fine road network facilitated the movement of Second Armor Division into a rapidly developing and classic exploitation.

Comparison on the Opposing Forces

In late March 1945 the 2nd Armored Division and its attachments were nearly at full strength as they initiated operations to cross the Rhine. The greater proportion of support troops caused the division to be referred to as a "Heavy Division". The use of this term was later to become incorporated into organizational doctrine and terminology. The availability of these additional assets permitted the division commander, Brigadier General I.D. White, to divide subordinate combat commands into task forces, battle groups or columns. In each case there existed the provisions of necessary troops, by type and number, to accomplish its assigned mission. Within the XIX Corps, the practice was to attach an additional motorized infantry regiment to its heavy armored divisions.

For the exploitation of the Ruhr Gebiet, Germany's industrial heartland, the 377th Infantry Division was attached to the 2nd Armored Division. Additionally, to provide Combat Commands A and B with a dedicated DS light artillery battalion, an extra artillery battalion was attached to the division. The division antitank and antiaircraft artillery capability was further augmented through the attachment of a tank destroyer unit and antiaircraft artillery unit to the division. These attachments were sliced to the division's subordinate commands for the linkup operation with the 3rd Armored Division.

The task organization which existed during the envelopment operation, the subsequent linkup and the final follow on movement to the Elbe River was as follows: [7]

SECOND ARMORED DIVISION

Commanded by BRIGADIER GENERAL I. D. WHITE

Combat Command "A"—Commanded by Brigadier General John H. Collier

Task Force A

3rd Bn. 66th Armd. Regt.
2nd Bn. 41st AIR
14th Armd. FA Bn.
1 Plat. Co. A, 702d TD Bn. (SP)
1 Plat. Co. A, 17th Armd. Engr. Bn.

CC "A" Control

Hq. CC "A"
Rcn. Co. 66th AR
Co. A, 17th Engrs. (—2 Plats.)
Maint. Co. 66th AR w/Co. F, 66th AR
and Btry. C, 195th AAA (—) atchd.
Co. A, 48th Armd. Med. Bn.

Task Force B

66th AR (—1st and 3rd Bns., Maint.
and Serv. Cos.)
3rd Bn. 377th Inf. Regt. Reinf.
65th Armd. FA Bn.
Co. A, 702d TD Bn. (—1 Plat.)
1 Plat. Co. A, 17th Armd. Engr. Bn.

Task Force R

377th RCT (—1st and 2nd Bns.)
1st Bn. 66th AR (—Co. F)

Combat Command "B"—Commanded by Brigadier General Sidney R. Hinds

Rcn Co 67th AR (Under CC Control)

Left Column

67th AR (—) Reinf.
Hq. and Hq. Co. 67th AR
1st Bn. 67th AR (—Co. G)
Co. B, 41st AIR
2d Plat. Co. D, 17th Engrs.
3rd Plat. Co. C, 702d TD Bn.
92d Armd. FA Bn.
CC "B" Trains
Maint. Co. 67th AR
Serv. Co. 67th AR
Co. B, 48th Armd. Med. Bn.
1 Plat. Co. G, 67th AR

Right Column

2nd Bn. 67th AR (—) Reinf.
2d Bn. 67th AR (—Co. E)
Co. C, 41st AIR
Co. D, 17th Engrs. (—2 Plats.)
Co. C, 702d TD Bn. (—2 Plats.)
Hq. CC "B"
78th Armd. FA Bn.
1st Bn. 41st AIR (—) Reinf.
1st Bn. 41st AIR (—Cos. B & C)
Co. E, 67th AR
1st Plat. Co. D, 17th Engrs.
1st Plat. Co. C, 702d TD Bn.
3rd Bn. 41st AIR
Co. G, 67th AR (—1 Plat.)

Combat Command "R"—Commanded by Lt. Col. Russell W. Jenna

Striking Force

3rd Bn. 67th AR (—Co. C)
1 Plat. TD's
Cos. B and C, 377th Inf. Regt. Reinf.
Co. C, 17th Armd. Engr. Bn.
(—1 Plat.)

Reserve Force

1st Bn. 377th Inf. Regt. (—Cos. B
and C Reinf.)
Co. C, 67th AR (—1st Plat.)
1st Plat. Co. C, 17th Armd. Engr. Bn.

CC "R" Control

Hq. and Hq. Co. 41st AIR
Serv. Co. 41st AIR
Det. Co. C, 48th Armd. Med. Bn.
1st Plat. Co. C, 67th AR

Division Artillery

Hq. Div. Arty.
696th Armd. FA Bn. w/atchd. AAA
258th FA Bn. w/atchd. AAA

Division Trains

Hq. Div. Trains
Maint. Bn. 2d AD (less)
Supply Bn. 2d AD
48th Armd. Med. Bn. (less)

Division Control

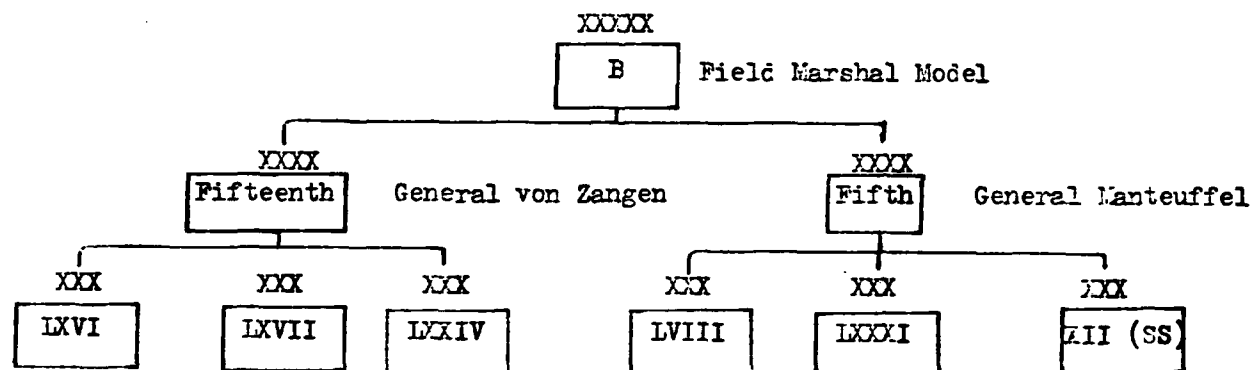
Hq. and Hq. Co., 2d AD
142d Armd. Sig. Co.
82d Armd. Rcn. Bn.
702d TD Bn. (SP) (less Cos. A and
C) w/attachments
195th AAA AW Bn. (SP) (less)

German ground forces located in the Ruhr Gebiet by the end of March 1945 totalled some one-third of a million soldiers. The principle command was the Wehrmacht's Army Group B under the command of field Marshall Model. Additionally, elements of the First Parachute Army were available to oppose Allied military operations in the vicinity of the Ruhr Gebiet. Collectively these commands amounted to a total of seven corps and the major components of some nineteen divisions. With the exception of the XII SS Corps, all remaining units were regular Wehrmacht infantry and panzer units. Many of these divisions were formed by consolidating remnants of units declared combat ineffective because of irreplaceable battle losses. The specific units encountered by the 2nd Armored Division along the northern edge of the Ruhr Gebiet included the 180th and 190th Infantry Divisions. [E]

The forces under Field Marshall Model's Army Group E were substantially as follows: [9]

ORDER OF BATTLE - GERMAN ARMY GROUP "B"

26 March 1945



Nominal strengths for Wehrmacht infantry and panzer divisions during late March 1945 were approximately 12,500 and 15,000 personnel respectively. In contrast to a Wehrmacht Panzer Division, an SS Panzer Division had approximately 20,000 personnel. Each Wehrmacht Panzer Division had approximately 160 tanks which were divided fairly equally between Type IV and Type V tanks. [10] By Easter Sunday on 1 April 1945 there were more than 350,000 German forces trapped within the Ruhr pocket. By the time the 2nd Armored Division had reached the Elbe River it had captured some 45,000 Germans since the outset of the envelopment operation. [11]

The second Armored Division did not possess any great technological advantage in the quality of weaponry, however; it did have a very substantial advantage in quantities of equipment and war materials. The overwhelming advantage in sheer numbers of operational main battle tanks was also supported by air superiority of the Allied Air Forces (XXIX Tactical Air Command)

operating over the Ruhr Gebiet.

Logistical and Administrative Systems

The U.S. forces were equipped primarily with the M4 tank which had either a 75mm or 76mm main gun. The Germans for the most part employed the Type IV and Type V (Panther) tanks with the 75mm main gun, and also the Type VI (Tiger) tank with the larger 88mm main gun. The Tiger Tank was superior in armament and protection when compared to the American made M4 Tank. However, this piece of equipment was in the same short supply as the newly developed V2 rocket and jet fighter aircraft, the ME-262. While these technological advantages were significant, the inavailability of sufficient quantities worked for the Allies and helped in their defeat of all German forces.

Logistical support was the most critical problem which the 2nd Armored Division had to overcome to insure success of the linkup operation. The large amounts of prepositioned supplies on the west bank of the Rhine quickly reached the advancing forces as a result of the Ninth Army's bridging of the Rhine at Wesel. Considering the fact that virtually within the period of two weeks the 2nd Armored Division was able to cover the distance between the Rhine and the Elbe Rivers, some 250 miles of road distance. The division's sound logistical planning permitted a pursuit of German forces in record time. Moving rapidly against varied degrees of opposition, the division's logisticians were forced to keep up with the units momentum.

The greatest administrative challenge which faced the 2nd Armored Division was the processing of over 45,000 prisoners of war captured between the Rhine and Elbe Rivers. The relatively light number of friendly casualties greatly served to reduce the administrative workload throughout the division. The division's actual personnel losses amounted to 81 killed, 153 missing and 401

missing. Equipment losses included 7 medium tanks, 6 light tanks and 9 half tracks. In comparison the division destroyed or captured 48 tanks, 255 antitank or artillery pieces, 579 vehicles, 18 trains and 265 airplanes.

Command, Control, and Communications

Good command and control is essential to any military operation. Field Marshall Montgomery was the British Commander to whom the Ninth Army and consequently the 2nd Armored Division were assigned for the purpose of the crossing operation of the Rhine at Wesel. General Simpson was the commander of the Ninth Army and Brigadier General White was the commander of the 2nd Armored Division. General Simpson was the senior American commander assigned to Montgomery's 21 Army Group. Critical cryptographic intelligence derived from ULTRA was not permitted to go below Army level, so it was therefore General Simpson's responsibility to ensure the absolute protection of this source intelligence. Subordinate to the Ninth Army were three corps, the XIII, XVI, and XIX, the latter to which the 2nd Armored Division was assigned. Major General R.S. McLain was the XIX Corps Commander during the operation from the Rhine to the Elbe. The success and speed with which the 2nd Armored Division accomplished its assigned mission can be largely attributed to the formation of two combat commands. The balance of forces, by type and number, for each combat command, established spans of control which facilitated mission type orders to subordinate echelons of command. The division's use of those surviving civilian telephone systems enhanced not only communications, but operationally served to negotiated surrenders of villages in the division's path of advance.

The division's ability to communicate with local nationals and enemy forces was not limited because of any shortage of qualified linguists. It

would appear that sufficient numbers of German speaking soldiers were available at all levels of command. In conjunction with the 3rd Armored Division movement along the southern edge of the Ruhr Gebiet the two divisions completed the coordinated linkup to surround the enemy units in the area on 1 April 1945.

Intelligence

At a minimum, intelligence was available to commanders at corps and echelons above corps levels. As this operation was an exploitation, intelligence on enemy dispositions was not extensively incorporated into our operational plans. However, since the Operation Overlord plans fit the movement of the 2nd Armored Division perfectly, we are certain that some intelligence information was utilized.

As the Army got closer to the Rhine, intelligence agencies had intensified their efforts. Every intelligence source was used, including aerial reconnaissance and photography, patrolling, radio intercepts, agents, and prisoners of war. A particularly valuable asset was the activity of the Army radio intelligence company, which devoted its whole attention to the location and identification of German units opposite the Ninth Army east of the Rhine. A new direction finder, the SCR-291, was used very effectively in this operation. However, intelligence on the enemy dispositions was thin due to the reconstitution that the Germans were going through and their constant shifting of forces during the withdrawal. Most of the intelligence gathered for and by the 2nd Armored Division came through the interrogation of enemy prisoners of war and recce patrols sent out forward of the Allied forward edge of the battle area (FEBA).

In the Northern area, the battle was fought along predetermined axis of advance as planned for Operation Overlord. Subsequently, although low level

real time intelligence was used by tactical units to achieve objectives and maintain the momentum, intelligence did not influence the way the battle was fought to any great degree. During the advance, there were numerous occasions where commanders sought out and used intelligence wisely. These events occurred mostly because of blown bridges. Commanders used reconnaissance elements, patrols, and air operations at these times to find alternate crossing sites. Still, it did not seem that the collection effort was centralized. There were few instances of timely intelligence dissemination and in the cases that the information was received in a timely fashion, it did not effect the battle.

Doctrine and Training

The 2nd Armored Division's activation on 15 July 1940 at Fort Benning, Ga was followed by a period graced with good commanders, adequate equipment, numerous training facilities and major exercises. When the American armored force was created in 1940 the men and tactics were ready to begin the necessary training. [12] At the time of the Pearl Harbor attack by the Japanese, Brigadier General George S. Patton, Jr. was the commander of the 2nd Armored Division. During the period, he commanded the division, he predicted America's entry into the war and cautioned the division to prepare for its role in the war. The division's participation in three large scale exercises in 1941 made it one of the best trained divisions in the U.S. Army. [13] When the division weighed anchor on 23 October 1942 to begin its trans-Atlantic voyage, it was well prepared for the missions it would receive until it made the return trip in December 1945. The manner in which the 2nd Armored Division participated in what has become a classic case of an armored envelopment clearly demonstrates the level of unit training and the degree to which armored tactics and doctrine

were implemented by the division. It was as a result of this noted ability that the 2nd Armored Division earned its nickname of "Hell on Wheels" from the Belgians. [14]

The 2nd Armored Division had commenced combat missions in North Africa and then in the Sicily campaign. It fought its first combat missions as part of the NINTH Army in France in August of 1944. The 2nd AD then moved to the Belgian front in October of 1944 and finally to Holland in late October of 1944. Consequently, it became the northernmost U.S. combat Army in the war. From February 11 to the beginning of March 1945, they conducted the Roer River crossing and attack to the Rhine. On the 24th of March the NINTH Army finally conducted the assault river crossing of the Rhine and occupied a bridgehead in the vicinity of Wesel.

Condition and Morale

The 2nd Armored Division had four days of recreation and maintenance prior to breaking out of the Rhine bridgehead. This was particularly significant to the well-being, morale, and conditioning of the American soldiers prior to the fight. During these days, nearly all of the units of the division engaged in maintenance and rehabilitation in bivouacs in the vicinity of Shiefbahn and Rheinberg. The division had more than 95% of its combat vehicles in operating order at the time that the division passed into the bridgehead at Wesel. This high percentage undoubtedly had a pronounced effect upon the efficiency of the division. Consequently, the American soldiers were well cared for and had excellent morale, health, and discipline. They wanted to be the first unit to Berlin. The Germans on the other hand were not at peak efficiency due to high battle attrition, and many individuals had lost all desire to fight for an obvious lost cause.

Leadership

The Germans military tradition is long and rich. They had been the leaders in military thought for many decades and had excellent military institutions where their leaders were taught. The Americans on the other hand were relatively new and unproven. But, in the short time that they had been fighting in World War II, their leaders had proven themselves to be extremely capable. Consequently, the officers on both sides were relatively equally well trained. There were no significant changes to the leadership on either side, thus neither side had the advantage of fighting against a transition leadership situation. However, the noncommissioned officers were probably better on the 2nd Armored Division's side because Germany, by now, was taking recruits right from high school and sending them into combat with little training.

There are many examples of flexibility of American leaders in adjusting to the changing nature of the battlefield. These two examples illustrate this flexibility. The planned crossings as per Operation Overlord would have been followed except for the chance which provided the Remagen crossing at a point somewhat further to the north than the crossings planned for the southern force in the vicinity of Mainz. "The extreme flexibility of armored operation played an important part in the closing of the Ruhr pocket. When it appeared that the pocket might not be closed because of the delay of the column assigned the mission of closing the gap, a second column was diverted from its mission to secure Lippstadt and insure the closing of the gap. The flexibility of organization which made Task Force Warren possible was vital in insuring that the escape routes were denied to the escaping armies." [15]

The Americans also had an advantage in small unit leadership. They had the freedom to apply innovative approaches to battlefield problems whereas the

Germans were more rigid, which delayed their actions until often they were no longer effective. As a result, the 2nd Armored Division had the advantage in overall leadership during this operation.

The Military Objectives

The 2nd Armored Division had the dual mission of closing the Ruhr pocket at Lippstadt, and seizing the passes through the Teutoburger Wald. Coincidental with this grandiose mission, it was to bypass the enemy wherever possible. This is a dangerous maneuver but it was necessary to maintain the momentum during the exploitation. Both Combat Command A and Combat Command B did a passage of lines and attacked out of the bridgehead to seize objectives in zone and bypass enemy resistance where necessary. The objectives were consistent with the armies' strategic and tactical goals as demonstrated by the success of the operation.

The German Army Group H had the mission to check the enemy (U.S.) advance at the Rhine. Their reaction to the encirclement was too late to be effective and they obviously failed in their objectives.

Analyze the Feasible Courses of Action

The direction that the course of action would take was dictated by terrain. It would be along the major highways which ran through the northern part of the Ruhr, following the cities of Wesel, Hamm, and Paderborn. It is well suited for a high speed attack which helped the 2nd Armored Division's tank forces move quickly into the exploitation phase. The only flexibility in choosing a course of action that the 2nd AD had was to attack in one column or multiple columns. They chose to attack in multiple columns. This turned out

to be a propitious choice, because as individual columns came upon blocked crossings or pockets of resistance they were able to shift their emphasis to the other columns and effectively bypass the strongpoints. Montgomery did not entirely agree with the plan, and he had an operation planned which would take him directly to Hamburg and then on to Berlin. He held on to this plan as an alternate course of action, however; and if the British troops had not been held up by muddy terrain and stiff resistance, he may have had his day and this course of action adopted.

The Germans were not so well off. They were already stretched thin with reconstituted units and after laying down their initial line of defense could not respond to attacks by moving units around to block the envelopment without leaving another weakspot in their line of defense. With the combat power that the Allies enjoyed, the Germans had little choice but to adopt this course of action.

The allies anticipated the weakness of the German combat power and as such selected an armor unit on each axis of the envelopment. Thus, the 2nd AD was best suited to undertake this operation in the north. They were rested, almost at full strength, and had high morale. Thus, the factors of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops available, and time) were important determinants in selecting the proper course of action.

The Germans, on the other hand, did not have the strength in either manpower or resources to stop the advance of the allied armies. It is postulated that had the Germans been well supplied, high in morale, and determined to fight for a cause; it is doubtful if two corps, unless provided a preponderance of armor in its assaulting echelons, with powerful support in the form of great quantities of self-propelled artillery could accomplish the mission against a relatively strong, well organized, and aggressive enemy. [16]

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of the Army, Armored Encirclement of the Ruhr: A Double Envelopment , Armored School Student Research Report, May 1949, p. ii.
2. Ibid., p. iv.
3. Ibid., p. 2.
4. Ibid., p. viii.
5. Ibid., p.vii.
6. Ibid., p.vii.
7. E. A. Trahan, A History of the Second United States Armored Division , Atlanta, Georgia: Albert Love Enterprises, 1947, pp. 172-173.
8. Armored Encirclement of the Ruhr: , p. xxv.
9. Ibid., p. xxi.
10. Ralph Bennett, Ultra in the West , New York, 1979, p. 268.
11. Donald E. Houston, Hell on Wheels, The 2nd Armored Division , San Rafael, California: Presidio Press, 1981, p. 423.
12. Ibid., p. xx.
13. Ibid., p. 103.
14. Ibid., p. xiv.
15. Armored Encirclement of the Ruhr: , p. 93.
16. Ibid., p. 94.

SECTION IV

The Fight



SECTION IV

"Describing the action of the 2d Armored Division's exploitation from the Rhine to the Elbe."

Disposition of forces and opening moves

Between the 1st and the 15th of March, 1945, as a part of the Ninth Army, the 2d Armored Division met heavy resistance but reached the Rhine south of UERDINGEN, capturing six towns. On 4 March 1945 the division concluded an operation begun in February 1945 titled the Cologne Plain Breakthrough. The division then advanced to the western end of the Rhine bridge at UERDINGEN, cleared the zone south of UERDINGEN and battled to the ARBUCKS CANAL. Division elements moved approximately 65 miles during the period 27-29 March 1945 to reach assembly positions short of the LD, generally along the HALTERN-DULMEN road [1]. For the remainder of March, until spearheading the XIX Corps attack to Berlin, the division rested, policed rear areas, conducted training and rehabilitation, and performed maintenance [2]. From the perspective of the US XIX Corps, the corps-level arrangements as of 26 March 1945 were the VII Corps on right and XIII Corps on left [3]. Beginning 28 March 1945 XVI Corps was on the right; For period 28-30 March 1945 the XVIII Airborne Corps was on the left, and on 31 March 1945 the VIII (Br) Corps was on the left. The XIXth Corps

attack to Berlin, with the 2d Armored Division as spearhead, was to be conducted in several phases; surrounding the RUHR, attacking through the TEUTOBURGER WALD, moving across the ELBE RIVER, and entering BERLIN. The 2d Armored Division was to attack, with CC "A" in the north (left) and CC "B" in the south (right). CC "R" generally followed CC "B". The division CP moved on 28 and 29 March. By the beginning of the assault it was in the town of ALTSCHERMBECK. At 0100, on 28 March, the 2d Armored Division was ordered to cross the Rhine on two bridges, pass through the 30th Infantry Division and cross the LIPPE River. The division was then to move through the 17th Airborne Division, turn east and exploit the breakthrough of the XVIII Airborne Corps. The attack, however, was delayed until 0600 on 30 March [4]. The 30th Infantry Division followed and supported 2d Armored Division.

The German units opposing the initial US advance on the east side of the Rhine were (N to S) 183, 176, and 338 VolksGrenadier Divisions and the 59th Infantry Division. Information as to controlling Corps headquarters of these divisions was not found, but the three volksgrenadier divisions were commanded by colonel's while the 59th Division was commanded by a generalleutnant. There were two army corps, one panzer corps, and two armies in the vicinity that could have played parts in the control of these combat units [5]. Available intelligence reports are

not clear on the exact control structure. Army Group "B" of the Western Front commanded by General Field Marshall Model exercised overall strategic/tactical control of the area. Remnants of German forces were making attempts to reconstitute in efforts to defend the industries of the Ruhr. As of 23 March the enemy was maintaining a defensive line on the south bank of the RHINE-HERNE CANAL. The number of the enemy depleted forces and reconstituted units made it difficult to determine the order of battle. Through radio intercept and POW interrogation the following order of battle in Ninth Army area was determined to be as follows [6]:

84th Inf Div	2,000
180th VG Div	2,500
Div "HAMBURG"	2,500
2 Para Divisions	4,500
183 VG Div	2,500
176 VG Div	2,250
338 VG Div	3,000
59 Inf Div	2,000
Misc units	<u>2,500</u>
	23,750

Reserves most likely to appear:

190 VG Div	3,500
116 Pz Div	3,000
15 PzG Div	2,500
Pz LEHR Div	3,000
245 Inf Div	2,000
Misc units	<u>7,500</u>
	21,500
TOTAL	45,250

By 31 March the order of battle and units in contact had been reduced to the following [7]:

180 VG Div	1,000
116 Pz Div	2,500
190 VG Div	3,000
2 Para Divisions	4,250
Misc units	<u>4,000</u>
	14,750

Immediate reserves:

Battle Group KARST	
(466 Div zbV)	2,000
Misc units	<u>3,000</u>
	5,000
TOTAL	19,750

The 183, 176, and 338 VG Divisions and the 59th Inf Division units first appeared in intelligence reports in Dec 44 listed as limited employment category. In Jan 45 reports they were categorized as general employment. The 3 VG divisions were commanded by a generalleutnant (1) and generalmajor (2) during the period when they were categorized as limited employment. When they were categorized as general employment the commanders were all Oberst (US colonel) [8], probably the MILPERCEN equivalent did not provide them with ODP support! The 59th was organized and employed under the command of a generalleutnant (from intelligence reports).

2nd Armored Division was organized into "A", "B", and "R" combat commands (CC). CC "A" & "B" each had two striking task forces, a reserve and CC headquarters control. CC "R" had two striking forces and a CC headquarters control. The combat forces were [9]:

armored regiments	- 2	AAA btry (.50 cal)	- 1
armored recon bn	- 1		
armored inf regt	- 1		
tank destroyer bn	- 1		
regt cmbt tm	- 1		
armored FA bn	- 4		
armored engr bn	- 1		

The troop list (roughly equivalent to a task organization) for the 2d Armored Division at the beginning of the RHINE-BERLIN offensive on 29 March was as follows [10]:

CC "A"	CC "B"
Task Force A	Rcn Co. 67th AR
3-66 Armd Regt	Left Column
2-41 AIR	67 AR (-) reinf
14 Armd FA Bn	1-67 AR (-)
Task Force B	92 Armd FA Bn
66 AR (-)	Right Column
3-377 Inf Regt	2-67 AR (-) reinf
65 Armd FA Bn	2-67 AR (-)
Task Force R	78 Armd FA Bn
377 RCT (-)	1-41 AIR (-) reinf
1-66 AR (-)	3-41 AIR
CC "R"	Div Control
Striking Force	142 Armd Sig Co.
3-67 AR (-)	82 Armd Rcn Bn
Reserve Force	702 TD Bn (SP) (-)
1-377 Inf Regt (-)	17 Armd Engr Bn (-)
	195 AAA (AW) Bn
DIVARTY	
696 Armd FA Bn	
258 FA Bn	

Because of the disorganization of German forces no information could be found regarding their "TOE" organization at this period. From the forces encountered and the descriptions of the various engagements and lists of weapons and prisoners captured, the VG probably was not equipped with anything heavier than panzerfaust (AT weapon) and 20mm AAA as direct fire weapons, perhaps some artillery, and individual weapons. The 59th Infantry Division probably was only slightly better off in that it probably had some tanks organic. A listing of weapons captured is as follows [11]:

Tanks - 48

Guns - 255

Vehicles - 579

The missions of the 2d Armored Division were to seize crossings of the DORTMUND-ELMS CANAL, cut communications east of HAMM; on order prepare to continue the attack east on BERLIN. (Original mission was accomplished in 36 hours.)

CC "B" launched its attack in the south during the night of 29-30 March 45 with mission of seizing crossings.

CC "A" attacked in the north with mission of providing a covering force and to secure crossings.

CC "R" followed CC "B" using southern portion of main axis with mission of patrolling and installing road blocks along south flank, protecting canal crossings after movement of main attack forces.

The 2d Armored Division crossed the line of departure in two main columns. The 2d Armored Division had those supporting units organic to the Division, including engineer bridging. Generally the modus operandi was for the tanks and tank destroyers to advance as far as possible with infantry mounted, and dismount infantry only to clear roadblocks or to clear towns that could not be bypassed [12]. Air reconnaissance was available, but not close air support. The Germans were flying some Me 109's and FW 190's, but did not seem to be coordinated with or concentrated around ground attack or defensive positions. In the area of supporting fires (air, smoke, special munitions) the German units exercised control by direct observation of those fires available to them, which were limited. Each attacking US column (4) had an armored field artillery battalion. Air reconnaissance was controlled from division level [13].

Apparently the US use of two combat commands, with a reserve, provided great flexibility. It can not be overlooked that the 2d Armored Division was one of two

"heavy" US divisions and therefore had great combat power [14]. The existence of the triad organization provided the division commander three forces to maneuver, while the triad in the A & B combat commands also provided this capability to these sub-commanders. It seems that in this exploitation this was used effectively to literally "flood" the battlefield with strong, aggressive armored forces to bypass and drive deep while the slower infantry units (e.g., 30th Infantry Division) secured and mopped up.

The Germans tried to establish blocking forces along critical road, etc. Their problems were lack of effective communications, the US forces moving faster than thought possible, and lack of properly equipped forces. The tactics used by the Germans were adaptations. The following report from the 102d Infantry Division, in the same Corps, illustrates the German defenses:

The defensive works which were to confront our troops from now on were largely of hasty type, comprising extensive antitank ditches, fire and communication trenches, L-type foxholes, field emplacements, wire, and mines of many types. Positions were normally based on towns where groups of buildings organized for all-around defense served as centers of resistance. In nearly every large town a continuous tank barrier in the form of log, concrete or steel rail roadblocks and antitank ditches between buildings, denied ready access to the heart of the community. As revealed through aerial reconnaissance and study of photographs [these towns] ... were classic examples of this hedgehog types of defense. These urban points were linked together by large-scale linear defense belts which ran generally north and south, parallel to ... major water barriers.... [15]

It appeared that the German units fought, not to attempt to defeat US forces, but to protect themselves and establish conditions for surrender. This did not apply when senior German officers were present or when SS troops were involved. The US soldiers were generally disciplined, but on occasion the discipline broke down temporarily. Despite this, US units maintained cohesion. Apparently German units maintained cohesion in smaller units (company-sized), but larger units were unable to maintain this cohesiveness, resulting in ineffective combat power in the initial contact.

Encirclement of the Ruhr, 30 March to 1 April

After crossing the Rhine River and moving into assembly areas southeast of Hunxe on 28 March 1945, the 2d Armored Division reinforced by two motorized infantry regiments, one from the 30th and one from the 95th Division, was prepared to attack eastward at 0600 hours on 30 March through the lines held by the 17th Airborne Division and the 30th Infantry Division. From the Ninth Army After Action Report, an indication of the difficulty of the mission is assessed as follows [16]:

There was strong evidence at the opening of the month that armor could be used for rapid exploitation. The enemy had nothing left in the path of the main breakthrough with which to seal off the armored penetration already effected by the 2d Armored Division. All the Germans could do was rush up extemporized formations piecemeal, mostly flak and reinforcement personnel, and utilize all the natural ground defenses that were available. A breakthrough similar to the one across France seemed within easy grasp, and Ninth Army moved rapidly to seize all the advantages of this opportunity.

In the north, Combat Command A was to cut communications routes east of Hamm and to secure crossings over the Dortmund-Ems Canal, while on the southern flank (right), Combat Command B was to attack toward Beckum, seizing the crucial road net in the area. Combat Command R, the division reserve, followed Command Command B on the right. The soldiers were enthusiastic, knowing that this campaign might well be the end of the long war.



28 March - 1 April 1945

28 March - 1 April 1945

- Charles B. MacDonald, U.S. Army in WW II, European Theater of Operations, The Last Offensive, Map XIV.

Charles B. MacDonald, U.S. Army in WW II, European Theater of Operations, The Last Offensive, Map XIV.

Approximat2100 on 29 March BG Sidney R. Hinds, commander of Combat Command B, began moving its reconnaissance elements eastward. Combat Command B made its initial contact with the enemy at 0100 on the 30th about seven miles east of Haltern and two miles west of Ludinghausen on the Dortmund-Ems Canal. The reported strength of the enemy was two companies of infantry with 20 mm guns, although when a column of Combat Command B moved against the force, no opposition was met except for a few stragglers. Scouts apparently found a bridge intact over the canal, however it was destroyed by the Germans before it could be secured. Reconnaissance elements of Combat Command B found two underpasses beneath the canal which were blocked and defended by infantry, artillery and antitank guns. After a brisk fight, the underpasses were secured and Combat Command B was able to pass under the Dortmund-Ems Canal. Once the far side was cleared, a bridge was constructed and in operation by 1730 on the 30th [17].

In another early contact on 30 March, several miles east of Dorsten, fifteen prisoners and five supply trucks were captured by Combat Command B. Identification was not positive, but the prisoners appeared to have been members of the 190th Infantry Division which was part of the XLVII Panzer Corps [18].

Combat Command A, commanded by BG John H. Collier, attacked at 0600 on 30 March in the northern portion of the division zone. It proceeded virtually unopposed for 30 miles to the Dortmund-Ems Canal vicinity of Ludinghausen where they found that the bridges across the canal had been blown. A canal barge was discovered tied to the bank and was cut loose. It was allowed to drift until it lodged lengthwise across the canal, making it an ideal foot bridge. The infantry quickly passed over the canal and advanced some 800 yards beyond the crossing site where they were engaged by enemy machine guns. The machine guns were quickly silenced by the 2d Armored Division mortars. Then, a treadway bridge was constructed by the engineers between the villages of Hiddingsel and Elvert. The bridge was completed by 1700 and Combat Command A's armor crossed the canal and continued the attack eastward one hour later. They continued to advance as they met little opposition throughout the night. The Combat Command halted near Ascheberg to refuel and eat during the early morning of 31 March 1945 [19].

The division reserve, Combat Command R, commanded by LTC Russel W. Jena, had the mission of supporting the leading Command Command and moved out at 0800 on 30 March. It was organized into a Striking Force and a Reserve Force which essentially provided a reserve within a reserve. Combat Command R conducted patrols and established road blocks on

the division's southern flank. The first day, on 30 March, Combat Command R captured forty-seven enemy soldiers which had been bypassed in the Olfen area [20].

By midnight of 30 March, Combat Command A had advanced with its main forces to positions near Senden and east of Altenhovel. Combat Command B had moved through the underpasses of the Dortmund-Ems Canal and was progressing through Selm toward Sudkirchen by midnight.

On 31 March, the 2d Armored Division continued to advance with two Combat Commands abreast, each with two task forces advancing on separate routes. Combat Command R continued to protect the right flank of the division. During the early morning hours of the 31st, Combat Command A continued to clear the area vicinity the Dortmund-Ems Canal while its forward reconnaissance elements progressed through Ascheberg thirteen miles east. Task Force A of Combat Command A had advanced over the poor roads against light and sporadic small arms fire and antitank fire from some Hitler Jugen who appeared to be between fourteen and seventeen years old [21]. They cut the Hamm-Munster railroad at Rinkerode and later cut the Hamm-Bielefeld railroad after seizing Oelde about 1915 hours. The task force continued east of Oelde and continued with its mission of cutting communications by severing the Hamm-Berlin autobahn one half mile southeast of Oelde [22].

Task Force B of Combat Command A which had halted near Ascheberg to refuel and eat, continued the attack in the early morning hours of the 31st. It encountered and destroyed an enemy motorized column in a sharp fight. In spite of a series of well prepared road blocks manned by dug-in infantry with small arms and panzerfausts, Task Force B reached Drensteinfurt by dawn of 31 March. The lead vehicle entering the town was destroyed, causing the column to deploy into a double envelopment to reduce the resistance. The battle began around 0900 with numerous artillery concentrations. As the attacking infantry approached, the tanks gave close fire support keeping all escape avenues sealed and all likely gun emplacements under fire. By 1000, the civilians had begun to show white flags. The defenders, however were German officer candidates from an Officer Candidate School in Detmold and were less willing to surrender. They put up a staunch defense with panzerfausts, self propelled antitank guns and small arms supported by mortars. After a three hour battle, Drensteinfurt was captured. Enemy casualties were estimated at 160 killed and 250 captured at a cost of twenty-two American casualties.

Task Force B of Combat Command A reassembled by 1230 and pushed eastward encountering scattered pockets of resistance which were largely bypassed to maintain the

momentum of the attack. Following infantry cleared out the bypassed enemy. By midnight of the 31st, they crossed the Hamm-Berlin autobahn in the vicinity of Delde near the bivouac of Task Force A [23].

Approximately twenty five miles to the northeast, the Teutoburger Wald extended from the vicinity of Osnabruck southeast to Kassel. It was a heavily forested range of hills rising up to eight hundred feet above the plain. This critical terrain feature was a natural barrier which would deny passage to the east if occupied by the enemy, and would make escape impossible if occupied by friendly forces. The Hamm-Berlin autobahn is the principal passage through the hill mass.

Due to the critical importance of the Teutoburger Wald, BG Collier divided Task Force A of Combat Command A, creating Task Force Warren, named after its commander, MAJ Cameron J. Warren the Executive Officer of the 2d Battalion, 66th Armored Regiment. Task Force Warren consisted of D Company, 66th Armored Regiment; E Company, 377th Infantry Regiment; A Battery 65th Armored Artillery Battalion; and a section of A Company, 702d Tank Destroyer Battalion. Its mission was to secure the north pass through the Teutoburger Wald, to prevent the Germans from defending the defile and to block the escape of the Germans trapped in the Ruhr pocket. Task Force Warren moved out at 1810 on 31

March and rapidly pushed down to the autobahn, bypassing a large enemy force at Brackwede. Fire was held to maintain surprise, and many enemy vehicles moved half the length of the column before knowing it was an American force. Some Germans even attempted to hitch a ride on the American tanks. At one road block, after dark, a German sergeant told three men of Task Force Warren to be alert because an American unit was coming this direction. The sergeant was killed before he could alert the rest of the German forces in the area.

The successful and rapid advance of Task Force Warren was halted at 2000 on 31 March when intense panzerfaust fire from the woods around Wilhelmsdorf stopped the column. The armored vehicles moved off the road while the infantry cleared a two and a half mile section of the autobahn. The advance continued through the night and by early morning of 1 April, Task Force Warren of Combat Command A had reached the foothills of the Teutoburger Wald. Later that morning, they launched an attack against Lammershagen, a key city on the autobahn in the Teutoburger Wald. Due to the nature of the terrain, the tanks were unable to render effective support, requiring the infantry to fight a fierce house to house battle. The enemy fires from panzerfaust, artillery, machine gun, mortar and small arms were finally subdued and the infantry cleared the town [24].

Combat Command B continued to push east in two columns through the early morning hours of 31 March 1945. They met their first determined resistance at Herbern, which was defended by some 200 well dug-in infantry with antitank weapons. The 1st Battalion of the 67th Armor and the 3d Battalion of the 41st Armored Infantry were deployed against the enemy who were identified as an OCS detachment from the school at Detmold. After LTC Batchelder, the 1/67th Armor commander, personally went forward to urge on the stalled attack, the enemy force was overpowered by mortar fire. The end result was fifty Germans killed, with another ninety surrendering.

After this quick but violent fight, which was representative of the campaign, Combat Command B continued the advance to the east. As they approached the town of Ahlen, they were greeted by a civilian delegation which surrendered the town. Ahlen was a hospital town and contained some 3000 patients and their medical attendants. The Americans were so well received that they were cheered on by the townspeople as the German police guided them through the streets.

Outside Ahlen, Combat Command B paused briefly to refuel and allow the men to eat. It is reported that while eating dinner at a gasthaus in Ahlen, BG Hinds called forward on the German phone system to the enemy commander in Beckum

which was the next town to be taken by Combat Command B. BG Hinds demanded that Beckum be surrendered in the name of humanity. The German apparently refused, at which time BG Hinds advised him that there would be tanks on the edge of Beckum at midnight, and that if one shot was fired, the town would be leveled. When Combat Command B entered the town later, they discovered that most of the enemy had evacuated a short time earlier. Combat Command B was able to take Beckum without bloodshed.

While BG Hinds had been talking to Beckum, a German troop train was passing through Ahlen attempting to escape eastward. In a state of confusion, the Americans opened fire on the train while the Germans tried to lower their 20mm antiaircraft weapons to return fire. Two batteries of the 92d Armored Artillery which had been facing in the opposite direction turned their 105mm howitzers and engaged the train. The train was quickly destroyed and prisoners rounded up. The Americans discovered that the train was carrying over a million antipersonnel mines [25].

At midnight of 31 March, Combat Command A was advancing along the autobahn against light resistance, following Task Force Warren and reducing by-passed enemy. Combat Command B was approaching the town of Beckum cautiously, since it was not yet known whether BG Hinds' phone call would be successful in getting the town to surrender. Combat

Command R continued to protect the right flank of the division and advanced to Beckum.

Early on the 1st of April (Easter Sunday and April Fool's Day), the 2d Armored Division fanned out in multiple columns to complete the missions of sealing off the Ruhn pocket at Lippstadt and seizing the passes through the Teutoburger Wald. Combat Command A continued to attack east and northeast to take the passes through the Teutoburger Wald. In order to assist Task Force Warren, Task Force B and Task Force R were sent to secure the southern passes. Task Force A continued to follow Task Force Warren up the autobahn and reduce the by-passed enemy.

Task Force R of Combat Command A advanced from its position near Delde at 0830 on the 1st on the center pass through the Teutoburger Wald. It progressed rapidly meeting light resistance and reached Schloss Holte by 1500. Passing through Dalbke and Lipperreihe without a fight, Task Force approached the town of Derlinghausen where they encountered heavy machine gun fire and small caliber antitank fire from the heavily wooded approaches to the city. During darkness, they were able to circle around the town, setting up an attack at dawn by three companies. The majority of Derlinghausen was taken, but heavy house to house fighting and determined counterattacks prevented the town from being

cleared until 2 April.

Task Force B of Combat Command A was given the southern pass through the Teutoburger Wald which lead to Detmold and Augustdorf. They left Stromberg at 0315 on 1 April and advanced five miles before encountering some light resistance in Stukenbrock. A few miles later, they ambushing a German supply convoy passing through Rietberg. By 1400, Rietberg was secured and the column pushed on for seventeen miles where it was stopped at 1700 by tank, panzerfaust and small arms fire from Augustdorf. The infantry dismounted from the tanks and began house to house fighting to clear the town. It did not finally fall until 2 April, after fighting continued all night through the 1st [26].

The early morning hours of 1 April found Combat Command B, in the south, continuing the advance with two columns abreast. The left column had the job of clearing Beckum if the town did not surrender peacefully, and the right column continued the attack. At 0150 on 1 April, BG Hinds was ordered to change the direction of his main attack and move on Lippstadt where he was to intercept a strong enemy force attempting to escape from the Ruhr pocket. Combat Command B's progress was slow through the night because of the poor roads and trails, but picked up momentum in the day. Just as the 3d Battalion of the 1st Armored Infantry arrived

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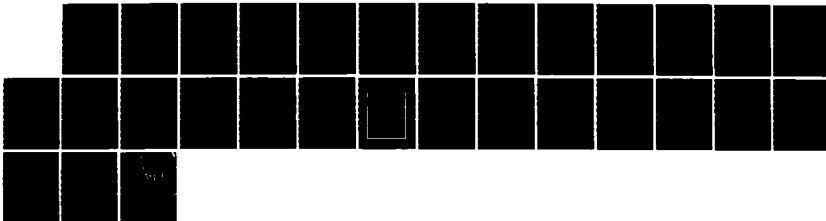
THE LAST PURSUIT: THE 2D ARMORED DIVISION'S
EXPLOITATION FROM THE RHINE T. (U) ARMY COMMAND AND
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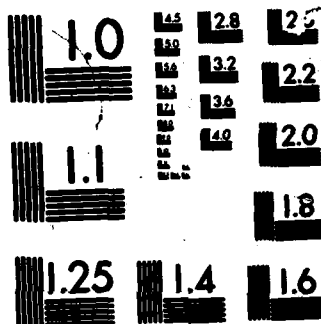
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near Lippstadt, they encountered a large enemy column attempting to break out. Several hundred Germans were captured and numerous vehicles were destroyed.

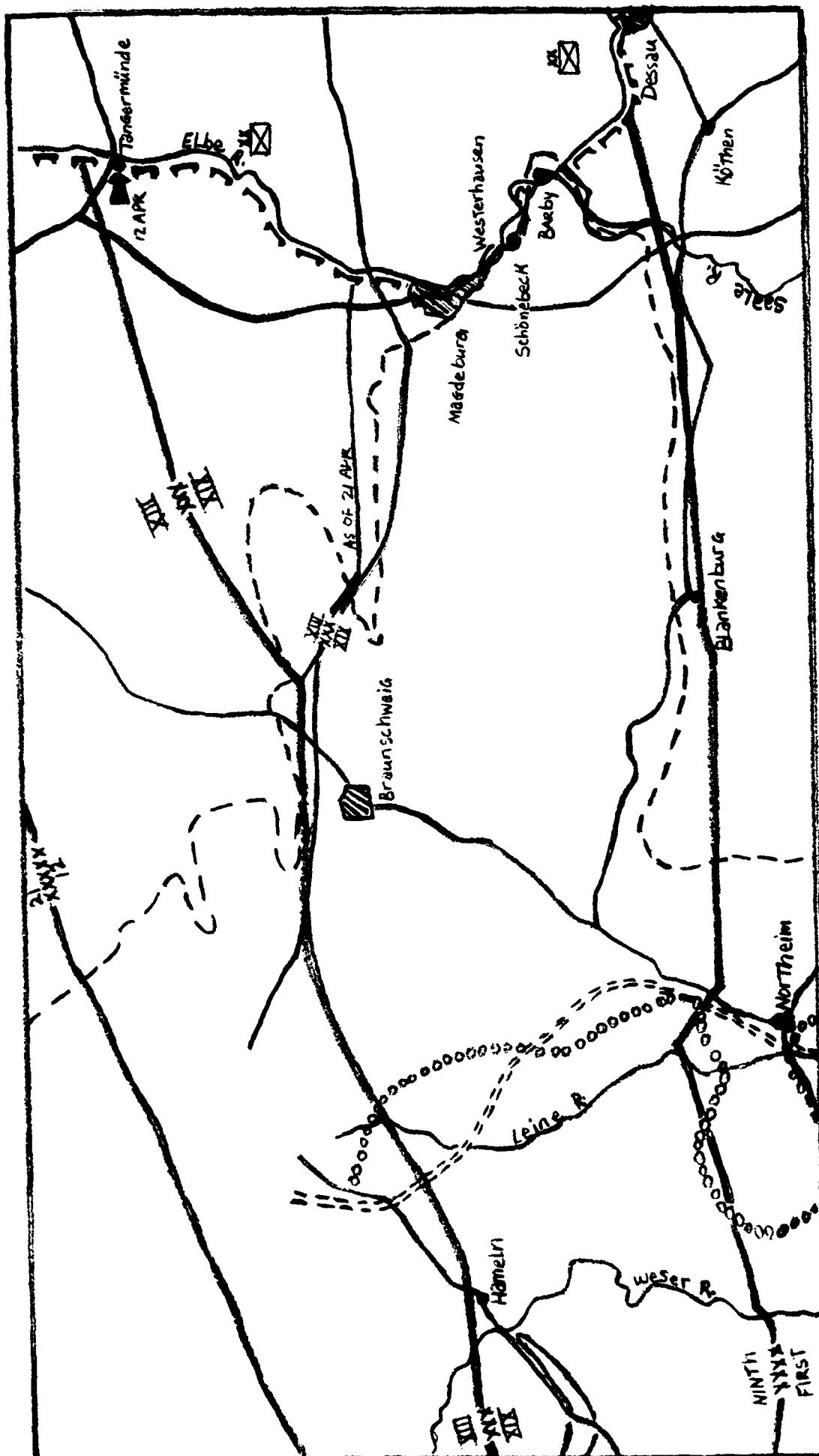
Realizing the critical importance of Lippstadt, General Raymond S. McLain, the XIX Corps commander, personally visited the area to verify that Combat Command B had reached its objective before he reported the information up to Ninth Army headquarters. BG Hinds felt compelled to commit his own tank and car to escort the corps commander back to a place of safety.

At 1545 on 1 April 1945, Combat Command B of the 2d Armored Division linked up with Task Force Kane of the 3d Armored Division in Lippstadt to seal off the Ruhr pocket. This succeeded in trapping some 350,000 Germans, which was the bulk of General Model's Army Group B, as well as denying the Germans huge quantities of ammunition [27].

At midnight on 1 April, the 2d Armored Division was deployed to cover practically every escape route possible for the German army in the Ruhr area. In the north, Combat Command A either held or was gaining control of the passes through the Teutoburger Wald through which the enemy might escape if he broke out of the pocket. In the south, Combat Command B had closed the pocket and established a line of outposts along the Lippe River in zone. Combat Command R

was ordered to assemble near Wiedenbruck and establish a line of road blocks along the autobahn from Wiedenbruck to the vicinity of Surenheim.

In the three days of rapid advance since crossing the Rhine, the 2d Armored Division had covered 70 miles through enemy held territory in a continuous attack to link up with First Army's 3d Armored Division. Fighting ranged from weak enemy resistance with sporadic small arms fire to violent and stubborn defenses [28].



DRIVE TO THE ELBE

4-24 April 1945

- Approximate Front, 4 April
- Approximate Front, 9 April
- Approximate Front, 13 April
- Elbe-Mulde Front, 24 April
- Armored Thrusts, Date Indicated

Charles B. MacDonald, U.S. Army in WW II, European Theater of Operations, The Last Offensive, Map XV.

Pursuit from the Ruhr to the Elbe, 1 April to 11 April

Having crossed the RHINE and established the linkup with the 3d Armored Division from First Army, the encirclement of the RUHR was completed on 1 April. With this event accomplished, the stage was set for the 2d Armored Division to begin the sweep to the Elbe as Ninth Army's vanguard.

CCA and CCB began their advance eastward 1 through 4 April as a result of plans developed by MG White, 2d Armored Div Commander, prior to the Rhine River crossing [28].

Initially, progress was smooth for CCB but CCA became embroiled in a series of struggles in the TEUTOBURGER WALD with retreating SS troops reinforced with an odd assortment of other German troops. With the assistance of the 119th Infantry from the 30th Division attached on 2 April, they were able to come abreast of CCB by 4 April on the Weser River[29]. The clean up of the remaining German forces in this area lasted several days and is described by the following from the 102d Infantry Division which conducted the operation:

Some three thousand enemy prisoners of war, representing a polyglot of miscellaneous units, were combed out of the villages and forests during the three day search. Among these ragged remnants were many who had changed to civilian clothing, some to escape capture, and others apparently under the sincere impression that for them the war was over and that now, having been 'liberated' from the merciless Allied bombardments, they were free to return to their civilian pursuits. While the

Munster Plain provided haven for a few hundred deserters and molingerers, so far no real resistance had been found anywhere. The mission was becoming more and more a problem of feeding and shuttling troops which were scattered over wide areas and long distances, and finally of collecting and evacuating the many prisoners that were being round up...In executing their many missions, units had in a measure laid aside orthodox techniques in favor of more expeditious methods. Battalions were assigned well-defined areas and moved to the perimeters by trucks. Once there, they...deployed and advanced...stopping to search...all likely hiding places. At dusk they were met...by their transportation and returned to their assembly areas for a hot meal [30].

On the night of 4-5 April, the 119th Infantry crossed the Weser River near HAMELN to establish a small bridgehead which was enlarged the next day by the Division's armor assisted by the engineers bridging efforts [31]. Once across the Weser River, the 2d Armored Division raced 30 kilometers to the smaller Leine River. At this point they were to hold up until ordered to advance by Bradley; however, opportunities were too good for such instructions to be observed literally. With Hinds' CCB alongside Collier's CCA, MG White made sure of capturing several Leine River bridges intact and drove on across the Innerste River near Hildesheim, some 16 kilometers farther, before he paused the next day, 7 April [32]. The pace of the operation, although closely scrutinized by higher headquarters who may have preferred a more orderly advance, remained rapid and opportunistic. With the continuing disintegration of German resistance, the main enemy because the problem of supply. Despite the major supply problems

associated with the rapid push, one of the XIXth Corps units following the 2d Armored Division records the success the unit experienced in their efforts to maintain the pace:

Even so, adequate supply kept pace with the advances of the Division. Ration distributing points...occupied several different locations during the nine-day period...the maintenance company occupied five different positions during this period. Engineer supply points moved forward four times, and the medical supply point displaced six times. On the other hand, the supporting Army Class I supply point was at one time 70 miles behind the Division, and Class II supplies were 36 miles to the rear. Gasoline and oil had to be hauled 48 miles. The nearest Quartermaster salvage and repair depot was 160 miles away, and the nearest supporting medical supply point was, at one time, 225 miles to the rear of us...Evacuation of thousands of captured prisoners of war presented a tremendous problem. Army inclosures were still west of the Rhine during the greater part of our advance, and were never closer to the Division than fifty miles. Here again, guard personnel could not be spared to march the prisoners over long distances, and it was necessary to impress into prisoner evacuation service every available empty supply vehicle returning to the rear [33].

On 10 April, CCB covered over 30 kilometers, stopping a train whose engineer said he had not known that the Americans were within 80 kilometers, and repeatedly scattering shoppers in towns where the trolleys were still running [34]. CCA, encountering the urban industrial area of BRAUNSCHWEIG and IMMENDORF, had a harder time, not only because of the usual urban obstacles of blocked streets and rubble, but because it ran up against 67 big antiaircraft guns grouped to protect the Herman Goering Steel Works and able to fire against ground targets with devastating

effect because the level terrain gave superb observation and fields of fire [35]. A related problem which had been plaguing the unit since it crossed the Rhine was the control of civilians and displaced persons. Although follow-on units were primarily responsible for dealing with these masses, it effected the 2d Armored Division operations as well:

They encountered the vast problems of feeding thousands of displaced persons; reinstituting law and order; investigating known...Nazi's and other suspicious persons; removing Nazi's from positions of authority and replacing them with less objectionable individuals; and of finding practical answers to a multitude of questions which arose daily. These problems, in various forms were to continue, growing ever greater and greater, as long as the...divisions remained in Germany...the problem was complicated by a serious shortage of food...This shortage, though serious, at no time became so acute as to necessitate issuance of army rations to civilians...Clothes also were plentiful. The solution to most shortages was in effecting an equitable distribution...It...became necessary to divert troops to police duty to insure that military arteries remained unimpeded by civilian traffic. Main supply routes were banned to civilians and all refugees were forced to travel across fields or on secondary roads [36].

11 April proved CCB's finest day of the war. Hinds' men and tanks attacked from around SCHLADEN and GROSS DOHREN at 0630 hours. They overtook fleeing German columns, swept aside the defenders of road blocks easily with tank cannon fire, surprised Volkssturm defenders who threw down their arms, and drove relentlessly forward. In the late afternoon and attached contingent of the Division's

reconnaissance squadron raced into a western suburb of MAGDEBURG, startling the bewildered civilians. After dark, a column of tanks commanded by Major James F. Hollingsworth made a run for a bridge across the Elbe River southeast of MAGDEBURG at SCHOENEBECK, but the Germans who had been fleeing suddenly turned to fight. Although Hollingsworth's tanks got within 15 feet of the bridge by using the old ploy of attaching a detachment of his tanks to the tail of the enemy column moving across the bridge in darkness, he was spotted and after an intensive battle lasting throughout the night, the Germans blew the bridge at dawn on 12 April. On the 11th of April, CCB had travelled 73 miles. Once again, a real battle had been fought in the supply area:

From the logistical standpoint, the week just ended had taxed supply facilities of the Division almost to the breaking point. It was found necessary to shift attached and organic trucks rapidly from one infantry unit to another in order to move personnel. The vehicles also were constantly shuttled back and forth to move supply points and supplies. Excessive distances between combat units and our dumps or truck heads, and between Division supply points and those of supporting echelons, necessitated operating trucks practically on a 24 hour basis. Day after day, drivers were only able to snatch a few minutes sleep while trucks were being loaded and unloaded. Many drivers stoutly maintained that they had to sleep in the truck cabs with arm and hand extended to receive a trip ticket [37].

Consolidation at the Elbe, 12 through 14 April

During the daylight hours of 12 April, the 2d Armored

Division worked to clear the west shore of the Elbe River from WESTERHAUSEN to SCHONEBECK. After night fell two battalions of armored infantry slipped quietly across the Elbe at WESTERHAUSEN. The enemy was apparently unaware of this crossing since no attempt was made to oppose it that night.

This 2d Armored Division bridgehead began to suffer evidence of renewed enemy interest at first light of 13 April. The 3d Battalion of the 119th Infantry promptly followed the armored infantry across the Elbe River and the Division's engineers began building a bridge before the two armored infantry battalions were completely across. At dawn on 13 April, when the bridge was about half finished, the enemy began laying a heavy and accurate fire on it and both adjacent banks destroying most of the pontoons. The Division called on XIX TAC for help from fighter bombers to suppress the enemy artillery and the ring of antiaircraft guns surrounding MAGDEBURG, but the race to the Elbe had carried the advance almost out of range of fighter airfields; no fighter bombers appeared. After another failed attempt to construct a bridge, MG Shite gave up. He ordered the three infantry battalions in the bridgehead to attack southward after nightfall, to capture a new crossing sight about five kilometers upstream at a point opposite the bridge earlier demolished by the Germans at SCHOENEBECK. As daylight approached, Company L, 119th

Infantry, and portions of a battalion of the 41st Armored Infantry were inside ELBENAU, about three kilometers east of the river and shielding the proposed new crossing place, while the other battalion of armored infantry had cleared some 250 Germans from the riverside village of GRUENEWALDE [38]. Other units were digging in open ground to form the wings of a bridgehead. Because there was no bridge, they had no tanks or antitank guns nor the means to get them to the unprotected infantry on the far side. About first light while they were still consolidating positions the infantry battalions were attacked by a regiment of Division Scharnhorst supported by Assault Gun Training School Burg with approximately eight tanks, assault guns and infantry. These units fought aggressively and well, and the bridgehead soon became threatened. Company L of the 119th became isolated in ELBENAU and promptly became the target of a systematic effort to destroy it altogether. Frantic requests for air support again produced no help. White's bridgehead was quickly becoming untenable.

On 14 April, MG White ordered CCR into the 83d Infantry Division's bridgehead 10 kilometers upstream to attack down the river's east bank and relieve the hard pressed troops at GRUENEWALDE and ELBENAU [39]. CCR moved out early in the afternoon, but the attack had hardly begun when word came to call it off. Matters had become so desperate in

the CCB's little bridgehead that General Hinds gave the order to withdraw. By late afternoon, most of the surviving infantrymen had made their way back to safety except for the men of Company L, cut off and hiding in cellars in ELBENAU. As tanks and tank destroyers fired from the west bank. XIX TAC arrived with auxiliary fuel tanks in place of bombs to strafe German positions and cover the withdrawal to safety of most of the 60 men.

With the failure of the 2d Armored Division's bridgehead on the east bank of the Elbe came also the end of the fighting war for the division. Ninth Army as well had its final days of belligerence ended here when Eisenhower informed the army commander that U.S. units would not attempt to capture Berlin but must await the advancing Russians from their present positions. The 2d Armored Division began occupation and military government duties and prepared to stand down. The only military event remaining for it was to line the victory parade through the rubble of Berlin after the Russian capture.

An analysis of the action

In the sweep to the Elbe, the 2d Armored Division advanced with such rapidity against such light opposition that it kept enemy preparations constantly unbalanced. There were no reinforcements beyond local conscripted and untrained forces, school troops, and a small number of SS troops.

Small pockets of resistance were encountered around anti-aircraft guns enroute to the Elbe. At the Elbe, enemy resistance stiffened with determined use of artillery and antiaircraft guns and the formation of the German Twelfth Army to fight through to relieve German forces trapped in the Ruhr pocket.

The enemy in a state of total confusion, exhaustion, and depletion was in need of all forms of men and material. The 2d Armored Division, facing light resistance during the sweep, required nothing beyond what was provided. At the Elbe, TAC air support was badly needed but was not available because the ground forces had advanced too quickly beyond the range of their fighter support.

In addition, the enemy was in need of field artillery support west of the Elbe. East of the Elbe, the Germans possessed and used very efficiently field artillery and antiaircraft guns in a ground fire mode. Field artillery support for the U.S. forces was adequate and used efficiently throughout the operation.

The Germans had no central commander with communications capable of coordinating defensive actions. Therefore, actions taken by the Germans upon initial contact were small unit, uncoordinated actions organized by a few professional soldiers or a garrison commander within the

cities. Actions taken by the U.S. commanders were to bypass nearly all enemy resistance, since it was slight, in preference to a headlong rush to Berlin. The U.S. armored units bypassed these small pockets of resistance and the follow on infantry mopped them up.

Although the German Army never fought as a cohesive unit until they reached the Elbe, pockets of German soldiers fought very well. Those forces formed by cadre and students of military schools fought extremely well and with fanaticism. The U.S. forces, however, fought as a strong cohesive unit and easily swept aside all German resistance west of the Elbe because of superior forces, fire power, and command and control.

Accurate casualty rates are unavailable, however, the German rates were high primarily to capture rather than KIA or WIA. German prisoners were placed on the autobahn median strips and told where to report. In many cases, they marched themselves to the PW point. With the exception of 330 losses at the bridgehead (of which only four were dead and twenty wounded), the U.S. forces suffered light casualties with no impact on the outcome of the battle.

The Germans had little combat support or combat service support forces until they reached the Elbe. Then they made judicious use of FA and antiaircraft guns in a ground fire

mode. During the sweep to the Elbe, the Germans made very good use of the antiaircraft in the ground fire mode particularly around the Hermann Goering Steel Works south of Braunschweig. The 2d Armored Division used their normal artillery support effectively during the sweep to the Elbe but it seemed to be ineffective in countering the German FA at Magdeburg during the attempts at river crossing operations. As before, friendly air had been outranged to be of any significance until they dropped their bomb racks in lieu of auxiliary fuel tanks in order to reach the Elbe and cover the withdrawal of the infantry isolated on the eastern shore.

A key event was the failure of MAJ Hollingsworth to capture the bridge on the night of 12 April and the accompanying resistance of the German defenders at the Elbe between Magdeburg and Shoenebeck. This was the turning point of the battle for the 2d Armored Division. The German commander used the time to organize and commit the Division Scharnhorst in a counterattack mode to reduce the bridgehead established by the 119th and 41st Infantry on 13 April. The 2d Armored Division commander seemed unable to counter this turn of events and was never able to establish a bridgehead. In fact, he was forced to cancel his bridging efforts and withdraw the infantry forces from across the river.

There is no indication that the German commanders anticipated the rapidity of the sweep to the Elbe. However, they seemed to know that the Elbe would be critical. The 2d Armored Division commander knew that the rapidity of his advance to the Leine River was significant and continued an additional seven miles beyond the river in contradiction to his orders in order to facilitate future operations. He saw the opportunity for the rapidity of the pursuit that was about to occur. MAJ Hollingsworth saw the significance of capturing the bridge on the night of 12 April but was unable to do so.

The 2d Armored Division enjoyed the decisive victory during the sweep to the Elbe but the Germans won the local tactical victory at the Elbe River because the U.S. forces were unable to establish the bridgehead. Had the war continued, the 2d Armored Division would have certainly prevailed.

ENDNOTES

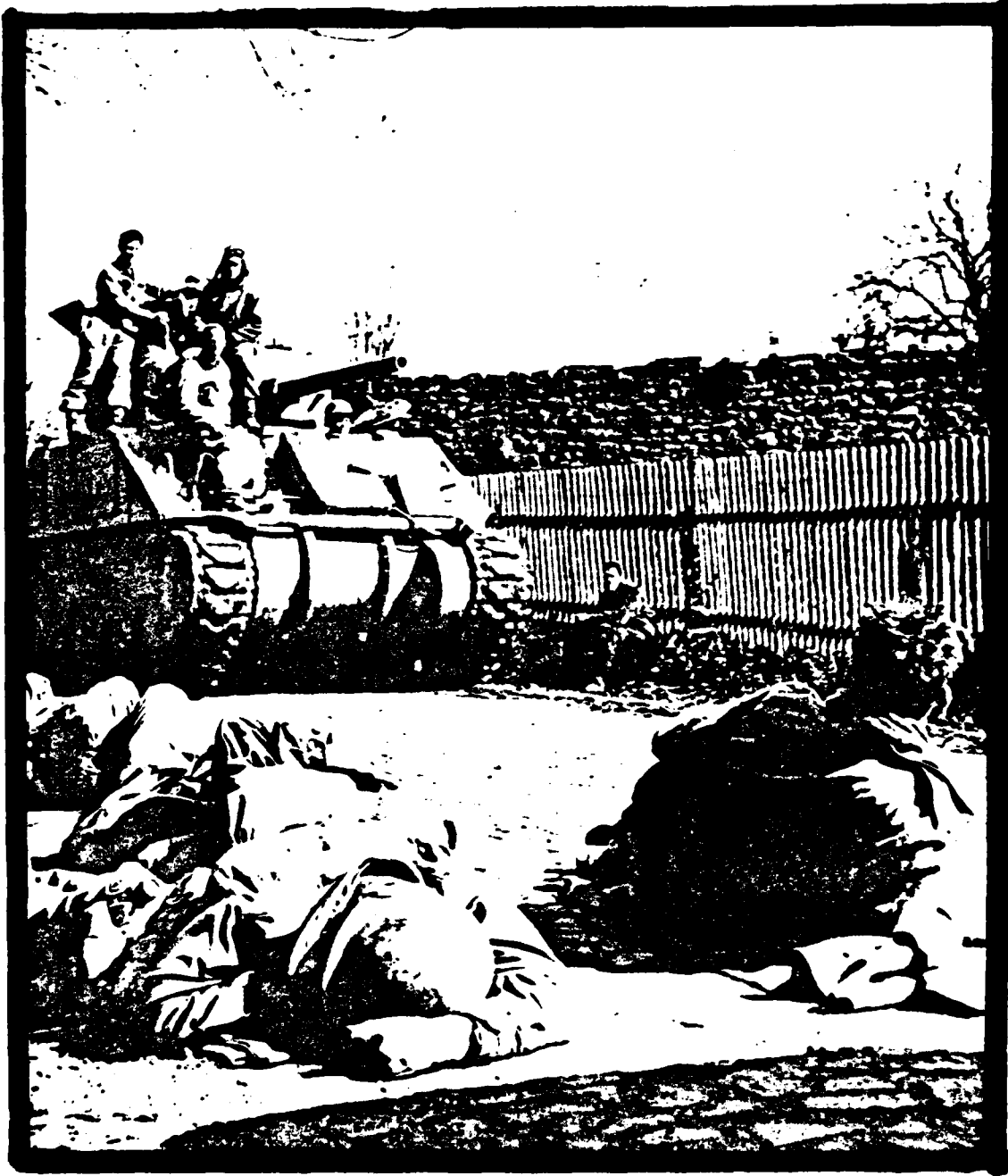
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SECTION V

Significance of the Action and Lessons Learned



SECTION V

"Military lessons learned from an Armor School Study"

The Value of Prior Planning

Prior planning was the key to the RHINE-ELBE operation. Conceived months before it took place, the planning which had been done caused the envelopment and exploitation of maneuver to be adopted for this strategic objective which would have been difficult to reduce by frontal attack. On a smaller scale, the selection of the units to make the envelopment, and the planning and maneuvering necessary to place them in the proper position, provided for the Army Group Commanders the force which had the capability of accomplishing the mission with the least losses in the minimum of time.

Maintenance and Rehabilitation

The complete rehabilitation of men and equipment prior to an operation of this character, which by its very nature required the most of men and materiel, is of paramount importance. It is worthy of note that the 2nd Armored Division had more than ninety-five percent of its combat vehicles in operating order at the time that the division passed into the bridgehead.

Undoubtedly the high percentage of fighting vehicles present for duty had a pronounced effect upon the efficiency of the division.

Commit the Armor Through a Hole

The 2d Armored Division in this action was committed through a breakthrough made by other forces. To do so preserves the

fighting strength of the armored division until it is in position to deliver a mortal blow to the enemy at a time when he can least stand such an attack. Of course, there will be times when Armor must make its own penetration, but every attempt should be made to provide a hole for armor to strike through if its maximum effectiveness is to be achieved.

Attachments for Self-sufficiency and Flexibility

The armored division is, of all the fighting forces, best suited to independent operations. However, it must have sufficient engineers and artillery attached to make it completely independent for a period of time. The engineers, with adequate bridging, insure that the division will not be stopped by water obstacles; and the artillery, in sufficient strength, is a potent weapon to insure the continuous advance of the division against even relatively heavy resistance. The presence of the Special Troops to accomplish any mission provides the flexibility which characterizes armored action.

Follow Up With a Strong Infantry Force

The 2nd Armored Division in this encirclement and exploitation followed as closely as conditions permitted by an infantry division. Also the 2nd Armored Division was reinforced by units of an infantry division as a means of holding the gains made until the following infantry could move forward to consolidate the area. The presence of the infantry strength made it possible for the armored division to drive on with comparative safety and without responsibility for the rear areas. Had the armor not had this freedom of action, the advance would have been slowed considerably

by the necessity of mopping up after each action.

Make Maximum Use of Available Crossings

The 2nd Armored Division made maximum use of the crossings seized to insure forward movement of the entire command. Whenever a crossing was secured, and other elements were having difficulty in crossing the same obstacle, the entire division, or combat command, was rerouted through the available crossing. The efficient use of crossing sites reduces the amount of fighting necessary, and frees the engineer bridging equipment for action at important obstacles where no crossings exist. Aggressive use of emergency or expedient bridging, such as the barges employed by Task Force B, Combat Command A, 2nd Armored Division at LUDINGHAUSEN, is vital to armored success.

Special Task Forces

The employment of special task forces or contingency forces to conduct special operations provides a means of exploiting the maneuverability and flexibility of Armor. The 2nd Armored Division's employment of Task Force Warren on such a mission is a good example of the use of a contingency force to seize economically a secondary objective. The economy and efficiency of such special task forces should not be overlooked.

By-pass the Enemy Whenever Possible

Throughout the operation are numerable examples in which the enemy force was blocked and by-passed so that the column might maintain its momentum and strike deeper into the enemy territory. This freedom to by-pass and elude the enemy is a characteristic of Armor that seldom should be ignored. However, by-passing

resistance is a dangerous maneuver, particularly if the enemy force is still present in sufficient strength to cut off the attackers. This factor must be considered anew each time a by-pass is considered. The by-pass is a calculated risk maneuver; properly applied it is of great value to the aggressive commander.

Flexibility

The extreme flexibility of armored operation played an important part in the closing of the RUHR pocket. When it appeared that the pocket might not be closed because of the delay of the column assigned the mission of closing the gap, a second column was diverted from its mission to secure LIPPSTADT and insure the closing of the gap. Again, the flexibility of organization which made Task Force Warren possible was vital in insuring that the escape routes were denied to the escaping armies.

Keep Pressure on the Enemy

In the days following the breakthrough, the 2nd Armored Division was constantly pushing forward against the enemy. Somewhere on the front a column was always fighting or marching forward. Fuel and rest halts were reduced to the minimum necessary to keep the division moving. The continuous and unrelenting pressure on the enemy, day and night, allowed no time for him to fall back and prepare a new position from which to resist.

Conclusion

With the foregoing lessons in mind, much consideration must be extended to the situation which existed at the time of this operation. The German Armies, at the time of the "Race to the ELBE", were already in desperate condition due to the heavy losses

which they had suffered throughout the winter. Hitler's Ardennes Campaign had extracted the last ounce of reserve manpower and materiel from the stockpiles. The continuous and effective bombing had rendered German industry incapable of providing more equipment, and the demand for troops on all fronts could not be met by all the sources available to the German Army.

The German Army was doomed to defeat at the time of the RHINE-ELBE offensive, and the total effect of the RUHR pocket was to reduce its ability to survive much longer. However, it is doubtful if the exploitation could have been carried out against a well supplied enemy, high in morale, and determined to fight for a cause. It is certain that one armored division alone would not have been sufficient force; it is doubtful if a corps, unless provided a preponderance of armor in its assaulting echelons, with powerful support in the form of great quantities of self-propelled artillery, could accomplish the mission against a relatively strong, well organized, and aggressive enemy. This action, then, becomes almost wholly a lesson in exploitation against a weakened and nearly defeated enemy. Treated as such, it provides a valuable lesson; treated as acceptable doctrine for any enemy at any time, it becomes a dangerous concept based on an erroneous assumption.[1]

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